



Your New Cat

Congratulations on the newest addition to your family! We want your adoption experience to be very positive for you and your cat, so we've put together information that you will find useful. The staff at Fox Valley Humane Association is here to help with any questions or concerns you may have so please be sure to call us.

Bringing Your Kitten Home

Kittens are much like small children – they are very easily distracted when playing, and when they have to go potty, they need to be close to a litter box. For this reason, your kitten should be introduced to your home a little bit at a time. Start in a single room, maybe a bedroom or large bathroom. If there isn't a window in the room, be sure to leave a light on during the day. Also, remember a night light after dark – even cats can't see the litter box in total darkness.

Necessities for the "safe" room include a litter box (or 2), food, water, and bedding in an area as far from the litter box as possible. Placing a carrier with a t-shirt or bedding previously used by the kitten is a good idea. And don't forget toys! You may also want to leave the radio on, playing softly.

Kitty should receive several visits each day for play, grooming or just getting acquainted. This will help your new arrival become familiar with the sounds and scents of her new home without your having to look for her all over the home. When kitty has adjusted after a few days, you can let her out to explore, but make sure she/he has access to her original "safe" room in case things get too scary.

General Health Concerns

In your adoption packet there is information regarding treatments your cat or kitten received while at FVHA. She/he was dewormed at least once but because there are intestinal parasites that may not have been removed by the deworming, we encourage you to take a stool sample to your veterinarian as soon as possible to make sure she/he doesn't have any other parasites. Other cats and kittens in the household should not share litter boxes until deworming is complete, since this is a primary way they can be passed from cat to cat.

Your cat had a Feline Leukemia screening test performed at FVHA and she/he tested negative. Your kitten has received at least one Feline Distemper combination vaccine. Please refer to your folder for the date(s) of vaccination. The vaccine protects your kitten from several airborne cat diseases. Your vet will tell you when and if booster vaccinations are needed.

Rabies is a disease that is 100% fatal in animals, and a vaccination is generally required by law. We recommend having your vet vaccinate your cat against this deadly disease. Humans can also get rabies from infected animals, and it is almost always fatal in humans as well.

Upper respiratory infections (URIs) or "kitty colds" are common in shelter cats and are often brought on by stress (i.e. entering a shelter, going to their new forever homes). Sometimes they take a few days to incubate and you may notice some of the following symptoms once kitty is in his/her new home:

- watery or goopy eyes
- runny nose
- repeated sneezing or wheezing sounds
- lack of appetite

URIs are often treated with antibiotics and TLC and may have a speedy recovery when they are treated at home as opposed to the shelter where other stressors can prolong the infection. Because you adopted from Fox Valley Humane Association, your first exam is free at any of our supporting vet clinics in the valley.

If your cat or kitten is eating but losing weight, not eating well, lethargic, or making frequent trips to the litter box, these are all signs of illness. Please contact your veterinarian if you see any of these symptoms. Never give your cat or kitten any medication that was not specifically prescribed for it.

Litter Box

Cats are fastidious animals. Proper litter box care will do a great deal to decrease the chance your cat may develop issues with the box. We recommend reading "The Fastidious Feline" by Dr. Patricia McConnell for more help in preventing litter box problems. Cats and kittens have a natural instinct to cover their waste so "training" to the litter box is generally easy. Start kitty out right in a box that is at least 16" x 22", with sides low enough to allow easy access. Studies have shown that

cats prefer the sandy textured clumping-type litter. Avoid litters that are scented as some of the scents may actually repel cats. If you prefer more natural type litters, there are several that are biodegradable and a few that can be safely flushed. You may also want to avoid the crystal litters – they are very hard textured.

Provide one litter box per cat, plus one extra box, not in all the same location. (2 cats = 3 litter boxes)
Multi-level homes need at least one box per level. You don't like to run up or down a flight of stairs to use the bathroom and neither does your cat.

Scoop every day. There are no other options. Your cat has two hundred million scent cells. If you think the box has a little odor, imagine what your cat smells! A dirty box is one of the biggest reasons why cats stop using the litter box. Avoid the problem and scoop! If using clumping litter, wash the box and change the litter monthly. For clay or biodegradable litters, wash the box and change litter weekly. Don't use liners – most cats don't like them. Wash boxes with hot, soapy water – never use cleaners, bleach or ammonia. Rinse the box thoroughly.

Litter boxes need to be separated – especially if you have more than one cat. Even if the cats get along, one may sometimes ambush the other going in or out of the box. Place in a low-traffic area and in a place where the cat cannot get locked out of. Don't put them in a noisy laundry room or in a room where children might be playing. Beware of dogs lurking around the boxes also.

Be observant when cleaning the box – larger or smaller amounts of urine or stool are often early signs of medical problems. Watch for diarrhea. Involve the kids in watching, too, if scooping is their job. An adult should check daily to make sure the scooping is being done. If you notice changes or if your cat stops using the box, please contact your veterinarian. Don't wait to see if the problem goes away. If your cat checks out fine medically, she/he may have a problem relating to the litter box's location, litter, or type of box.

Feeding

We recommend feeding a high-quality dry kitten food until your kitten is about one year old. Divide the amount fed into two or three meals so the food is fresh. Feeding your kitten a spoonful of canned food once a day will help your kitten get accustomed to different tastes and textures and may make it easier to get them to eat special foods, if necessary, later in life. Canned food also provides extra moisture in the cat's diet because they tend to not drink much water.

To encourage your kitten to drink an adequate amount of water, place water in bowls or coffee mugs in several locations around your home. Change water frequently and wash bowls daily. Some kittens like water fresh from the tap and others like it better when it's been refrigerated. There are fountain watering devices available that may also improve water consumption.

Please do not feed your cat or kitten table scraps or dog food. It's not a good idea to give them milk or ice cream because these can cause vomiting or diarrhea. Cats can never be vegetarians.

Play

Cats and kittens are like children. They need regular play time. Kittens will play with just about anything from paper balls to paper bags and cardboard boxes. They love to chase and pounce on things. Balls and catnip toys are also great. Toys such as "Da Bird," "Cat Dancer" and lasers engage your cat in play. They encourage exercise while keeping hands, arms and feet at a safe distance so kittens don't associate hands or feet with play. Start off right by teaching your kitten that hands are for petting and loving, not playing and biting. Make sure to put any toys with string and feathers away when play is over because the kitten may chew off pieces or ingest string.

It's important to provide two or more interactive playtimes each day. Your kitten may sleep better if one of those playtimes is shortly before bedtime. Make sure kitty is tired at the end of the day. Always supervise children with your kitten or cat. Even well-behaved children can have occasional lapses in judgement.

Scratching

Scratching is as natural as breathing for your cat. There are multiple reasons for scratching:

1. It provides a way to stretch and exercise the shoulders and front legs.
2. It relieves stress or boredom.
3. It leaves behind a visual mark to mark territory, and the scent glands in the paws leaves olfactory markers behind.
4. Scratching removes the outer covering of the nail to keep it healthy.

Scratching is one behavior that is 100% trainable, according to Cats International. If appropriate scratching materials are provided, cats can quickly learn what's okay and what surfaces (like your furniture) are not okay. You can use double sided tape to prevent your cat from using specific surfaces. Encourage your cat to use the post by including it in your play sessions and praising when she/he does use it. You can also sprinkle a little catnip at the base of the post. Position acceptable scratching materials by sleeping and play areas and near room entrances. By observing where your cat likes to scratch, you can figure out the best places to put posts. Never punish your cat for scratching. Your cat will only learn to do it when you're not around, and it may make your cat afraid of you.

A scratching post is easy to build. If you opt to purchase a scratching post from a pet store, make sure at least one of the posts is covered with sisal, as cats may have a hard time telling the difference between the texture of carpeting on the post and the arm of your favorite sofa. Some of the commercially available posts and trees are a bit expensive, but you will have

it for the lifetime of your cat, and it's investment in your cat's comfort and well-being.

Keeping your cat's nails trimmed is easy and necessary. This is generally a very simple procedure and we can show you how it's done. By rewarding the kitten when you trim her/his nails, it becomes a positive experience. As you decide whether to declaw your cat or not, it is important that you are making an informed decision. Cats with and without claws can live in harmony. Because it is a painful procedure (it is actually an amputation comparable to cutting off each of your fingers at the first knuckle), we encourage you to be proactive and make sure adequate pain medication is provided during the procedure and for a few days following.

Neutering or Spaying Your Cat

All cats are spayed or neutered before they are adopted from FVHA. According to the Humane Society of the United States, a female cat and her kittens, if left unaltered, could produce 420,000 kittens in only 7 years. Spaying a female cat will decrease her chances of developing mammary cancer or an infected uterus later in life. Neutering males will help prevent testicular cancer and will reduce the chances that they will develop urine marking behavior. Neutered males are much less likely to roam the neighborhood and their urine will not develop a strong, irritating odor.

Introducing Your New Cat to Your Household

You've brought home a feline friend for Fluffy, but Fluffy isn't amused. She is not the least bit interested in the little ball of fur who keeps trying to terrorize her every time she dares to come out of the bedroom. In fact, you might even be worried about how aggressively Fluffy is reacting to the new addition to the household. It doesn't matter if the new addition is a kitten or an adult cat – often the response is the same. Fluffy is letting you know that she is not pleased. Don't lose hope.

Judging by the number of calls and emails we receive, this is not uncommon. We can almost always solve this problem if you are willing to invest the time and effort. Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist, Patricia McConnell, Ph.D, often says it will take about 6 months to fully introduce two cats to each other.

Rule #1 is never, ever punish either cat for aggressive behavior. She/he will learn to associate the punishment with the other cat and our goal is to have her make only positive associations with the new cat.

Rule #2 is to let the cats determine how fast the introductions can go. Learn to "read" your cat's body language. Watch for signs that the cats are relaxed – calm facial expression, able to eat or play or lie down in a relaxed posture, relaxed walk, usually with a happy tail, versus a crouched posture, tail down or bushy, large pupils, licking lips and looking like the slightest sound will send her running to the next county. Recognizing when the cats are relaxed around each other will cue you in to moving on to the next step. You cannot go too slowly. But, going too fast will backfire.

Start with setting up a "safe room" where the new cat will live for however long is necessary. This should be a comfortable room with a window and perch, a cat tree, litter box, food, water, bedding, toys, maybe some cardboard boxes to hide or play in, and a radio on for company. Bring the new cat directly to this room when you arrive home. Do not stop and let the cats see each other. Their own sense of smell will let them know something is up.

Now is the time to use bribery. Find yummy treats – canned chicken cut up in very small kibble-size pieces works nicely, but you can use deli turkey or ham, tiny pieces of cheese or any treat that your cat really wants. Enlist the help of a friend or family member and on opposite sides of the safe room door, give treats to both cats if they are calm.

Next, use timesharing – put the resident cat away for a while and let the new cat come out and explore. You can put the resident cat in the safe room to check out scents of the new cat. You can also swap bedding for scent exchanges.

When the cats are ready, open the safe room door just enough for them to see each other – maybe a half inch. Reward the cats with treats for being calm while the door is partially open. After several days of relaxed behavior at this level, try a baby gate (or 2, stacked) in the doorway. Some cats will try to climb the baby gates. If that sounds like your cats, go to Plan B, which is to place one cat in a carrier so they can see each other but still not have complete contact. Some clients have temporarily replaced the wood door to the room with a screen door to allow them to see each other. Reward with treats if the cats are calm. Keep these sessions very short and always stop before the cats hiss or growl.

When they can be calm face to face, they can be out together for very brief periods of time, but only when supervised. Again, your goal is to have the cats in the same room and reward them for being calm. Gradually extend the period of time as long as the cats remain relaxed. An occasional hiss or growl is to be expected, but anything more means they aren't ready for this much contact yet.

Some additional hints: Try a product called "Feliway" or "Comfort Zone" to help ease the transition. It's a synthetic form of natural scent that cats leave behind when they rub their faces on furniture or your legs. Play is a great stress reliever so play with your cats daily to ease the tension a bit. Remember...let the cats determine how fast to go. You want them to be buddies for many years to come, so a few weeks or even months to do a proper introduction is worth your time.

Is Your Cat Stressed?

Causes of stress in cats can be many and varied. Most cats don't deal well with change...any kind of change. Little things like a change in food or feeding schedule, your work schedule, the litter you use, or furniture can affect your cat. Big things like having a baby, moving, changes in activity level, bringing home a new animal, a change in members of the household, remodeling, or owners going on vacation can especially send your kitty "over the edge."

Stress in your cat can cause problems with the bladder. Often, one of the first signs of major stress is when kitty fails to

use the litter box. A recent study conducted by Ohio State University discovered that over one-half of the cats presented for urinary problems in private practice are affected by “idiopathic cystitis.” That simply means no physical, medical, or nutritional cause was found for the problem. Always consult your vet immediately if your cat stops using the litter box.

If stress is a contributing factor in kitty’s problem, you can improve the situation by making the environment more interesting. Cats love to look out windows, so provide a perch by your cat’s favorite window. Your cat needs vertical space even more than floor space. Your cat would probably also love a small fish tank, just make sure the cover is very secure!

Play and exercise are great stress relievers for your cat or kitten. Pick up a couple of fish pole type toys and spend a few minutes playing with your cat at least once a day. Rotate the toys to keep things more interesting. In addition to play, spend time grooming your cat each day. It will feel good to your cat and increase the bond you share, as well as decrease the hair on your furniture.

Try hiding little bits of food or treats around the house so your cat has to hunt for food. You can use a tissue box with some holes cut along the bottom edge to allow paws inside, and place food, treats or a ping-pong ball inside, depending on your cat’s age and interests.

If your cat is still having trouble coping with change, you can also try a product called Feliway or Comfort Zone. It’s a synthetic facial pheromone (like the ones a cat spreads when rubbing her/his face on the furniture), and it helps many cats feel calmer.

Weight Control

Obesity is the number one nutritional disorder in pets in the western world. If kitty is carrying extra pounds you should be concerned about getting her/him back in shape. Problems like liver disease, heart disease, diabetes and arthritis are more likely to occur in overweight cats. Pet manufacturers put charts on their food bags recommending how much food kitty should get, but their suggestions are often higher than the caloric requirements for most cats. To make matters worse, the change can be so gradual that we don’t notice the weight gain until kitty gets on the scale at the annual exam at the vet.

If you have been filling the food bowl every time it gets empty and have no idea how much your cat eats every day, start using a measuring cup and cut back to the recommended level according to your cat’s food bag or your vet’s recommendations. If you’re already feeding the recommended level, it’s not always a good idea to decrease the amount you are feeding. Pet foods are balanced to provide nutrition if eaten in certain amounts. If you cut back on the amount of food, you are also decreasing the nutrition your cat is getting, which could have an adverse effect on her immune system, skin and coat. “Light” foods are not restricted enough in calories to promote weight loss, but once the extra pounds are gone, you may be able to use them to maintain the new weight.

With your vet’s advice, find a diet your cat likes. Remember that no one diet works for humans and the same holds true for cats. If one doesn’t work, hopefully the next one will. Your vet will also tell you how much weight your cat should lose each month, so it’s important to weigh in regularly. It’s important to your cat’s health to make sure he/she continues to eat well. Not eating can make your cat extremely ill.

As for exercise, play fetch with your cat if she/he likes that game. If your cat likes to chase things, get a couple of interactive, fish pole type toys to get her/him moving. Play for as long as your cat has energy. If it’s been a while since your cat has been active, start slowly. You don’t want to overdo it and cause an injury. You can also hide kitty’s food around the house. Hunting for food will keep your cat mentally stimulated as well.

Take a good look at kitty’s figure. You should be able to feel the ribs when you push in slightly. If there’s a lot of padding covering the ribs, it’s a clue that kitty is too “fluffy,” and you need to work with your vet to shed the extra pounds. Pick a diet that works, help her/him exercise and stick with it. The weight will come off and your cat will be more active, healthy and happy.

Reasons to Keep Your Cat Indoors

Your cat will be healthier! If your cat is exposed to outside unvaccinated cats, they are at risk for feline leukemia. If your cat is exposed to wild animals, they are at risk for rabies. On average, an indoor cat’s lifespan is 15 years or longer while an outdoor cat’s lifespan is only 2-3 years.

By keeping your cat indoors, it will reduce the risk of exposure to fleas, ticks, ear mites and internal parasites. These parasites can cause disease and general misery to you and your pet. You can also avoid transmitting these parasites to other animals in your home. They will also avoid serious injuries caused by other animals (both wild and domestic) or by vehicles! Untreated bites or wounds can lead to pain and infection and if left untreated, it could lead to the death of your cat. Cats are very curious and can easily get into lawn and garden chemicals, rat poisons, bug sprays, antifreeze, oil, gasoline and other products left in the garage and outdoor sheds. These toxins can lead to a very ill cat or death.

When your cat is left to roam outside, they smell other cats’ territorial markings. This may lead to the habit of spraying inside your home or spraying urine on your neighbors’ property. Both habits are undesirable and can be a challenge to correct. When cats are in unfamiliar territory and around strange people, it can directly affect their personality. A cat that is startled or fearful can scratch or bite a person even if the person is trying to help them. As the cat owner, you are financially liable for any damages that could occur. These costs could include medical bills for the injured person and/or fines.