THE ULTIMATE *KITTEN* HANDBOOK

EVERYTHING YOU NEED FOR YOUR NEW BEST FRIEND



Welcome to Redstone Animal Hospital!

Thank you for choosing us to care for your newest family member! We're thrilled to be a part of your kittens journey and are here to support you every step of the way. From their first wellness check-up to routine care and beyond, our team is dedicated to ensuring your cat grows up healthy and happy.

If you ever have questions or need advice, please don't hesitate to reach out. Call us anytime at **303-683-1675**, we are always here to help!

Welcome to the Redstone Animal Hospital family!



DVM Megan Sheets, DVM

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Table of Contents

- Kitten Schedule 3
- Vaccine Information
  - Understanding Maternal Antibodies 4
  - FVRCP 5-8
  - FeLV 9
  - Rabies 10
  - Vaccine Reactions..... 11- 12
- FELV/FIV Testing..... 13
- Spaying/Neutering 14
- Alternatives for Declawing 15
- Parasites
  - Internal Parasites 16-17
  - Heartworm Disease 18
  - External Parasites 19
- Dental Care 20
- Household Toxins 21-22
- Tips for A Multi-Cat Home 23
- Pet Insurance 24
- Feline Boarding 25
- Helpful Handouts 27-37

Kitten Schedule

Please note that this is a tentative schedule and is subject to change due to age or provider discretion.

	8 Weeks	12 weeks	16 weeks	1 year
Nose to Tail Exam with Doctor				
Health Assessment with Technician				
Fecal Test		**Only If Needed**		
Deworming		**Only If Needed**		
FVRCP (Combo)				
FeLV (Feline Leukemia)				
Rabies				
Heartworm/Flea/Tick Preventative				



Vaccines given before 8 weeks of age are not considered effective due to the presence of maternal antibodies.



Understanding Maternal Antibodies

Why they matter:

When kittens are born, they receive temporary immunity from their mom through her milk, known as maternal antibodies. While these antibodies protect kittens during their early weeks, they also prevent vaccines given before 8 weeks of age from providing long-lasting immunity.

The Timing of Vaccines is Crucial for Immunity

When we first see your kitten it is common for them to have already received a FVCRP (Panleukopenia, Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, and Chlamydiosis) vaccine from their breeder or shelter at around 6-7 weeks of age. Due to maternal antibodies these vaccines will be neutralized and will only be effective for a short period of time. So, we will be recommending a series of 3 vaccines around 8, 12, and 16 weeks of age. All vaccinations are given 2-4 weeks apart (If your kitten received a vaccine at 7 weeks, you may want to schedule their first appointment at 9 weeks so that we can give them another FVRCP). These vaccines will create long lasting immunity from many contagious diseases. The most important one is the 16 week vaccination, if vaccines are stopped too early - the puppy won't have the immunity because of maternal antibodies.

The Right Time to Vaccinate

To make sure your kitten builds strong immunity, vaccinations should start at 8 weeks, when maternal antibodies begin to fade. This ensures the vaccines work properly and protect your kitten from harmful diseases.



FVRCP

(Panleukopenia, Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, and Chlamydiosis)

- This is a combination vaccine, protecting your kitten against 4 deadly diseases.
- **Route: Subcutaneous Injection**
- **Number of Vaccinations In Kitten Series: 3**
- **Re-Vaccination as an Adult: Every 3 years**
- Core Vaccine*

Feline Panleukopenia (FPV)

Transmission:

Highly contagious and spreads through contact with infected cats or their bodily fluids (feces, urine, saliva). It can also be transmitted indirectly through contaminated objects like bedding, food bowls, and grooming tools.

Clinical Signs:

Gastrointestinal Signs: Severe vomiting, diarrhea (often bloody), dehydration. General Signs: Fever, lethargy, anorexia (loss of appetite). Neurological Signs: Ataxia (loss of coordination), tremors, seizures (especially in kittens).

Treatment:

There is no specific antiviral treatment for FPV. Supportive care focuses on managing symptoms.

THE SURVIVAL RATE FOR KITTENS DIAGNOSED WITH FPV IS 20% TO 51%.

FVRCP

Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus and Panleukopenia

RHINOTRACHEITIS (FHV)

Transmission:

FHV is caused by a herpes virus (Feline Herpesvirus-1) and spreads through direct contact with infected cats or through respiratory secretions

Clinical Signs:

Sneezing - nasal discharge - conjunctivitis (inflammation of the eyes) - Fever - lethargy - decreased appetite.

Chronic Carriers:

Some cats may become lifelong carriers, intermittently shedding the virus, especially during times of stress.

Treatment:

There is no cure.

Treatment focuses on supportive care such as keeping the eyes and nose clear of discharge.

Antiviral medications may be used in severe cases, but they don't eliminate the virus; they simply reduce symptoms and shedding.



FVRCP

Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus and Panleukopenia

CALICIVIRUS (FCV)

Transmission:
Common cause of respiratory disease in cats and spreads through direct contact with infected cats, saliva, and respiratory secretions.

Clinical Signs:
Painful ulcers in the mouth, causing drooling, difficulty eating, Sneezing, nasal discharge, conjunctivitis.
FCV can sometimes cause lameness (limping) due to joint inflammation.

Treatment:
Supportive care includes fluid therapy, nutritional support, and pain management for oral ulcers..

CHLAMYDIOSIS

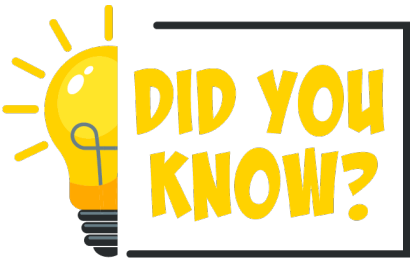
Transmission:
Chlamydiosis is caused by Chlamydophila felis, a bacterium that primarily affects the eyes and respiratory tract. It spreads through direct contact with infected cats or their secretions.

Clinical Signs:
Conjunctivitis (red, swollen eyes), ocular discharge, sneezing, nasal discharge, mild Fever and general malaise may also occur.

Treatment:
Antibiotics are effective in treating chlamydiosis.

FVRCP

Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus and Panleukopenia



PANLEUKOPENIA

The virus can be spread on all surfaces & is very difficult to eradicate. It can live on anything for 1 year in not cleaned properly.

FVRCP : THE ESSENTIAL VACCINE

The FVRCP vaccine is a key part of keeping your kitten healthy. It protects against several serious illnesses: Panleukopenia, Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, and Chlamydiosis. With this vaccine, your kitten gets comprehensive protection in one simple shot, ensuring they stay safe from these common but dangerous diseases.

LEARN MORE

Click Here

FeLV

Feline Leukemia Virus

Route: Subcutaneous Injection
Number of Vaccinations In Kitten Series: 2 - regardless of indoor/outdoor
Re-Vaccination as an adult: Yearly if you have an outdoor car

Transmission

Spread through close contact with saliva, nasal secretions, urine, and feces of infected cats. Kittens can also contract the virus from an infected mother during pregnancy or nursing.

Clinical Signs

Early Stage

Many cats show no symptoms initially.

Progressive Infection:

FeLV can lead to various health problems over time, including: Immune System Suppression, Anemia, Cancers, and Reproductive Issues.

Treatment

There is currently no cure for FeLV. Supportive care includes managing secondary infections, anemia, and other symptoms to improve the cat's quality of life.



RABIES

Route: Subcutaneous Injection - single vaccine administered in Kitten Series
Re-Vaccination as an Adult: 1 year after first vaccine, then every 3 years.
Required by the state of Colorado!

Transmission

Rabies is a viral disease affecting mammals, including cats and humans, usually spread through the bite of infected wildlife like bats, raccoons, skunks, and foxes. The virus resides in the saliva of infected animals and enters through broken skin or mucous membranes.

Clinical Signs

Prodromal Stage:

Early signs include behavior changes, fever, and mild neurologic symptoms.

Furious Stage:

Cats may become aggressive, excitable, and show erratic behaviors like snapping.

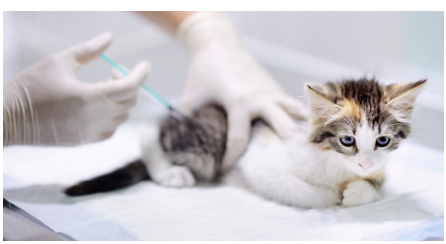
Paralytic Stage:

Cats may become paralyzed, starting with hind limbs, and may have swallowing difficulties or excessive drooling.

Treatment

There is ***no cure for rabies*** once clinical signs appear!

Prevention through vaccination is the key to protecting cats from this deadly disease.



Vaccine Reactions

Vaccine reactions in kittens are typically mild and temporary but can occasionally occur as their immune system responds to the antigens in the vaccines.

Common reactions that do not need immediate attention may include:

Slight Discomfort or Soreness:
It's normal for kittens to experience mild discomfort or soreness at the injection site. This typically resolves within a day or two.

Mild Fever:
Some kittens may develop a slight fever, which is their body's natural response to building immunity. This usually resolves quickly without intervention.

Lethargy or Decreased Activity:
Kittens may seem more tired than usual or exhibit decreased activity levels for a day or two after vaccination.

Decreased Appetite:
It's not uncommon for kittens to have a temporary decrease in appetite following vaccination. Ensuring access to fresh water and offering small, palatable meals can help encourage eating.

Mild Swelling or Redness:
A small, localized swelling or redness at the injection site can occur, but it should be minimal and resolve on its own.

Vaccine Reactions

Severe reactions that need immediate attention:

Difficulty Breathing:
If your kitten has trouble breathing, shows signs of respiratory distress such as gasping, wheezing, or coughing, this could indicate a serious allergic reaction known as anaphylaxis.

Facial Swelling:
Swelling of the face, particularly around the eyes or muzzle

Hives or Rash:
Raised, itchy bumps (hives) or a widespread rash on the skin

Vomiting or Diarrhea:
Persistent vomiting or diarrhea shortly after vaccination

Collapse or Seizure:
Loss of consciousness, or seizures shortly after vaccination

Persistent Lethargy or Weakness:
Severe and prolonged lethargy or weakness that persists beyond the expected mild post-vaccination period.

High Fever:
A high fever above 103ºF that persists

It's important to note that serious vaccine reactions are ***very uncommon***.

If you notice anything concerning after your kitten's vaccinations,
don't hesitate to contact us or the nearest Emergency Clinic.

CVSG
(303) 794-1188
401 E County Line Rd Littleton CO 80122

FELV/FIV TESTING

Early Detection

- Kittens can acquire FeLV or FIV from their infected mother during pregnancy, birth, or nursing.
- Early testing helps initiate appropriate care and management.

Health Monitoring

- FeLV and FIV are retroviruses that weaken the immune system.
- Testing helps identify infected kittens, allowing for close health monitoring and timely intervention.

Prevent Transmission

- FeLV and FIV are contagious among cats.
- Knowing a kitten’s status helps prevent transmission in multi-cat households or environments.

Vaccination Decisions

- Negative test results allow safe vaccination against FeLV and FIV. Redstone currently does not vaccinate against FIV.
- Positive test results may alter vaccination protocols, especially for FeLV.

Prognosis and Planning

- Test results help veterinarians and owners plan for the kitten's long-term care.
- Appropriate management strategies can be implemented based on the results.

Quick Test:

- FeLV/FIV test requires only a few drops of blood.
- Results are available in as soon as 10 minutes.

Spaying/Neutering

Why it matters

What is Spaying and Neutering?

- Spaying: Removes the ovaries and uterus of female cats.
- Neutering: Removes the testicles of male cats.

Health Benefits

- Females: Reduces the risk of uterine infections, breast tumors and behavioral issues.
- Males: Reduces the risk of testicular cancer, prostate issues.

Behavioral Benefits

- Females: Eliminates heat cycles and reduces unwanted behaviors.
- Males: Reduces marking, aggression, and roaming.

Population Control

- Prevents overpopulation and reduces the number of stray cats.
- Lessens the burden on shelters and reduces stray cat problems.

When to Spay or Neuter

- At RSAH we recommend neutering your male cat at around 16 weeks of age to help prevent medical and behavioral issues.

  At RSAH we recommend spaying your female cat between 4-7 months of age.



Alternatives to Declawing

Scratching Posts and Pads

Provide a variety of scratching posts and pads to satisfy your cat's natural urge to scratch.





Nail Trimming

Regularly trim your cat’s nails to reduce damage from scratching.

Soft Paws®

Apply soft, plastic nail caps to your cat’s claws to prevent scratching damage.





Behavior Modification

Use positive reinforcement to train your cat to use scratching posts.

Environmental Enrichment

Provide toys, climbing trees, and interactive play to reduce stress and destructive behavior.

Learn More

Click Here!

Intestinal Parasites

Roundworms

- **Most common** worm found in cats.
- Can infect kittens before they are even born.
- Live freely within the intestine, feeding off partially digested intestinal contents.
- Can become infected by sniffing or licking infected feces.
- Leads to growth reduction by depriving them of vital nutrients.
- **If ingested by humans,** they can become encysted in various organs.

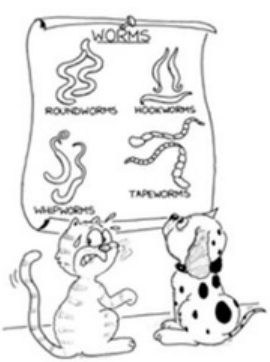
Hookworms

- Hook-like mouth allows them to attach to the intestinal lining.
- Can infect kittens before they are even born.
- Difficult to see to the naked eye.
- They ingest large amounts of blood = life threatening anemia.
- Zoonotic: Able to burrow in **your skin.**

Whipworms

- One of the most pathogenic worms found in cats.
- Causes watery, bloody diarrhea, and weight loss.
- Eggs are resistant to drying & heat – Can live in the environment for up to 5 years.

Continue to Learn More...



Intestinal Parasites

Tapeworms

- Hook-like mouth allows them to attach to the intestinal lining.
- Shed proglottids through feces (little, white rice).
- Must pass through an intermediate host (a flea or rodent) before infecting the cat!
- Heavy infection in kittens can lead to severe anemia & lack of growth.
- Not all heartworm preventatives protect against tapeworms – Importance of flea prevention.

Giardia

- One-celled, microscopic parasite.
- Found naturally in the environment, but rainy periods can cause over-population.
- Can cause diarrhea, gas or flatulence, greasy stools, and sometimes vomiting.

A Note about Giardia: sometimes Giardia can be hard to get rid of and can require multiple rounds of treatment! In these cases we recommend trying to boost your kittens immune system with an easily digestible GI diet and probiotics after treatment!

Coccidia

- Found in fecal contaminated ground - Swallowed when pet grooms or licks the dirt.
- Infections are common in young animals.
- Causes watery diarrhea, which may be bloody.

WE RECOMMEND A FECAL TEST ANNUALLY!

LEARN MORE

Click Here!

CAPC
Companion Animal Parasite Council

Heartworm Disease

Heartworm disease is caused by tiny worms passed on by mosquito bites. When an infected mosquito bites a cat, it passes larvae into the cat's bloodstream. These larvae travel to the heart and nearby blood vessels, growing into adult worms.

Clinical Signs

Coughing -- Weight Loss -- Easily Tired

Diagnosis

Simple in-clinic blood test, usually done annually.

Treatment

Unlike dogs, there is ***NO*** treatment for heartworms In cats.

Prevention

There are many different kinds of preventatives to fit your individual cats needs! At RSAH we carry Feline Bravecto Plus in clinic, though you can order alternative brands online through our online pharmacy. Examples are: Advantage Multi and Heartgard for Cats

DID YOU KNOW?

More than 1 in 4 cats diagnosed with heartworm disease were classified as "indoor-only".

INTERESTING FACT



External Parasites

Fleas

Fleas are pesky parasites that can infest kittens and puppies, causing itching, hair loss, and health risks like anemia and disease. Kittens can pick up fleas from their environment or other animals, leading to discomfort and skin irritation.

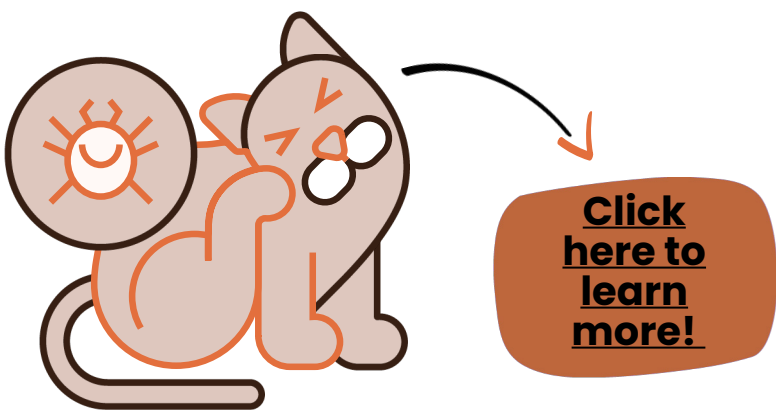
Ticks

Ticks are commonly found in grassy, wooded, and outdoor areas, waiting for a host to pass by. Puppies can pick up ticks during walks or outdoor activities.

Clinical Signs:
Visible ticks on the skin, ***especially around the ears, neck, or between toes.*** Skin irritation, redness, or swelling at the bite site.

Prevention

Monthly preventatives kill fleas and ticks at various life stages and can be tailored to your kittens size and age! RSAH carries Bravecto in office but other options are available and can be ordered through our online pharmacy!



Dental Care

Here are some **important tips** and practices for dental care:

Start Early!

Begin dental care routines as soon as you bring your kitten home to help them get used to having their mouth handled and establish good habits early on.

Use a ***cat-specific toothbrush and toothpaste,*** starting with gentle brushing motions on the outer surfaces and gradually increasing the duration as your kitten becomes more comfortable.

Preventing Tartar Buildup

Treats like feline C.E.T. treats, and Greenies help to break down tartar. Using a DentaHex Oral Rinse after every meal can also prevent tartar build-up!



If tartar is allowed to remain on the teeth...

Tartar pushes the gums away from the teeth, exposing the roots and leading to loose teeth and infection. This can cause gingivitis or sore throat, and though antibiotics may help temporarily, the infection often returns. If the infection enters the bloodstream, it can spread to other parts of the body, ***often affecting the kidneys and heart.***



Learn why kitties need a dentist too!

Household Toxins! Part One

Many household items can be toxic to cats if ingested. To keep your furry friend safe, here are some common household hazards to be aware of:

Household Plants

- **LILIES!** - as a cat owner you should never have a lily in your home or even your garden. While beautiful flowers lilies are toxic to cats and our furry friends can go in to kidney failure just by inhaling the pollen
- Other plants such as Aloe Vera, snake plants, philodendron and more are toxic to cats if ingested.
- Symptoms can range from mild gastrointestinal upset to more severe effects depending on the plant.

Human Medications

- Over-the-counter medications like acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) can be toxic to cats, even in small amounts.

Grapes and Raisins

- Even small amounts of grapes or raisins can cause kidney failure in cats. The exact toxin in grapes and raisins is unknown, so it's best to avoid them entirely.

Onions, Garlic, and Chives

- These vegetables and herbs, whether raw, cooked, or in powdered form, can damage a cat's red blood cells and lead to anemia.

Chocolate

- Chocolate contains substances called theobromine and caffeine, these substances are poorly metabolized by cats, leading to toxicity even with small amounts of ingestion.



Household Toxins!

Part Two



Marijuana

- Marijuana toxicity is one of our more common toxicities! Even in small amounts marijuana ingestion in cats can cause vomiting, urinary incontinence, lethargy, shaking, difficulty standing and more!

Cleaning Products

- Household cleaners with bleach, ammonia, or harsh chemicals can be toxic to cats.
- Symptoms of exposure include vomiting, drooling, coughing, difficulty breathing, and skin irritation.
- Keep cleaning products out of reach and use pet-safe alternatives when possible.

Rodenticides and Insecticides

- Contain toxins that can be harmful ***or fatal*** to cats if ingested.

Antifreeze (Ethylene Glycol)

- Antifreeze has a sweet taste that can attract cats, but even a small amount can cause kidney failure and death.

Alcohol

- Cats are much more sensitive to alcohol than humans.
- Can cause intoxication, coma, and death in cats.

ASPCA POISON CONTROL

(888) 426 - 4435

Tips for a Multi-Cat Home

Gradual Introduction



- Introduce new cats slowly to prevent stress and aggression.
- Use a separate room for the new cat initially.
- Allow the cats to sniff each other through a door or gate.

Feliway

- Feliway is a copy of the feline facial pheromone used by cats to mark their territory as safe and secure.
- It helps reduce stress and anxiety in cats by creating a sense of familiarity and security in their environment.

FortiFlora Calming Care

- FortiFlora Calming Care is a probiotic supplement designed to support a calm behavior in cats.
- It contains a specific strain of beneficial bacteria that helps manage stress and anxiety.

Multiple Litter boxes

- Provides enough space for all cats to use the litter box comfortably.
- Reduces territorial disputes and litter box avoidance issues.
- Provide at least one litter box per cat, plus one extra (e.g., three litter boxes for two cats).

Microchip Feeders

- Microchip feeders are automatic feeding devices that only open for the specific cat wearing a registered microchip or RFID collar tag.
- They ensure that each cat gets access to their own food without interference from other pets.



Petivity through Purina offers wonderful accessories from automatic feeders with facial recognition to litter box monitors to help you keep track of your feline friends health!

Pet Insurance

Thinking about getting pet insurance for your kitten!?

The best time is actually right after adoption! Insurance companies look for pets with preexisting medical conditions that affect long term care when offering coverage, so getting insurance BEFORE your kitten begins to show signs of a life long condition can help you lock in a low deductible and the best possible rate for you and your pet!

What is Pet Insurance?

Peace of mind that you can afford treatment. Pet insurance pays you back when your pet is treated for an accident or illnesses. It helps you get veterinary treatment while protecting your savings account.

Is Pet Insurance Worth It - For You?

1 in 3 pets need expensive veterinary care. Infections, eating something they shouldn't, x-rays, tooth extraction, limping, cancer, medications and more can cost thousands of dollars. Pet insurance can be a great option for you to look in to for your pet to ensure you are prepared for any circumstance! At Redstone Animal Hospital we accept Trupanion at the time of service but other insurances can be submitted to for reimbursement!

PawlicyAdvisor

Compare brands side-by-side!
One form, hundreds of quotes.
Click here!

trupanion™

The ONLY insurance plan that has Vet Direct Pay!
No out of pocket expense.
Click here!



My Pets Place at Redstone Animal Hospital

303-683-0330

More info

Click Here!

FELINE BOARDING

A Home-Away-From-Home

Going away for a quick weekend or traveling for an extended period? We've got your back! Boarding and lodging for cats is available with My Pets Place!

Cat Condos: $38 per Night!

Our cat condos are 2 level private spaces to allow your cat the ability to lounge as they please! Privacy curtains are provided to allow our shy guests some extra personal space and all condos face a large window to allow plenty of enrichment for your feline family member!

Kitty Suites: $67 per Night!

Our Kitty suites are private rooms that offer your cat a home like environment with a full size litter box, window shelves for outdoor watching, and multiple hiding spots as well as elevated surfaces to encourage enrichment!

Add on Services:

Daily Report Card: Starting at $9
Receive a once daily report card telling you how your cat is doing during their time at My Pets Place!

Kitty Cuddles: Starting at $10
Perfect if your cat loves human interaction and attention! We will offer your cat treats, toys and cuddles! Only the best for your furry family member!

Abolish Anxiety: Starting at $10
If your cat struggles anxiety this add on service is perfect for you! We will use calming pheromones once daily along with Composure Pro calming treats to help ease your cats stress and anxiety!



Litter Box Blues

Solving Housesoiling Problems

AAHA press

PET BEHAVIOR BROCHURE SERIES

While most cats are very clean and dependable in using a litter box, they may eliminate in undesirable locations for a number of different reasons.

Two Types of Elimination Problems

"Spraying" is marking that is done with urine when the cat is standing, not squatting, as is the case for the more familiar urination that occurs in the litter box. Spraying frequently occurs against vertical objects (e.g., furniture, plants, or walls), but cats can also stand in a more central area and spray a line of urine. Spraying is about social, olfactory, and visual signals that other cats understand. Cats spray in a standing posture with their tail raised and their backside facing the object or region to be marked. They put their tail up (cats with raised tails want to be seen), quiver or flick the tip of their tail, and tread or knead with their feet. Cats may also mark with urine or feces on horizontal surfaces, but this type of marking is not as flagrant as spraying. Marking may be a social signal or one associated with social stress or distress. All marking is associated with sending some kind of social signal.

Housesoiling is not driven by social signals. Housesoiling or inappropriate elimination is when cats who previously reliably used their litter boxes begin to void urine or feces in places other than the litter box. Cats who housesoil squat to urinate or defecate on horizontal surfaces to avoid their litter boxes. Cats can learn to become averse to some aspect of the box (e.g., it's dirty, it's too tall, it's in a closet and they got trapped, it has a liner and their feet got stuck, it has a cover and a big dog waits outside) or they can learn that they like a location or a texture that is different from what their box offers (e.g., a corner of a quiet staircase, a soft throw rug).

Physical Illness as a Cause?

Changes in elimination behaviors may be caused by a medical problem. Older cats who are arthritic may not be able to get to a litter box. Cats with diabetes or kidney disease urinate frequently and may not be able to get to a box in time or may not like a chronically

wet box. Cats with bladder infections are in pain and may leak or be unable to climb into the box without pain. Cats who are constipated are in pain and may associate the box with pain. Cats with diarrhea may get caught short and may not like dirty boxes. Hormonal conditions like hyperthyroidism and age-related brain changes can also lead to housesoiling. The first step in addressing any housesoiling problem should be a veterinary examination of the cat.

Housesoiling Problems Unrelated to Marking

If the problem is not medical, the next step is an in-depth evaluation to determine the behavioral cause and design a treatment plan that will best suit your cat and your household. Some situations are commonly associated with toileting changes where cats do not always use their litter box:

- Environmental (e.g., new furniture) or social (e.g., new cat) changes that occurred just prior to the onset of the problem
- Changes in litter, box location, box type, or styles (e.g., liners, tops, doors, automation)
- Cleanliness, including dirty litter, inadequate fresh litter, scratched and soiled boxes, inadequate ventilation, etc.
- Availability of more desirable locations or surfaces to eliminate
- Problems in the relationship between the cat and other cats or dogs and people in the home

Why Do Cats Mark?

Marking may occur as a response to the introduction of new cats or dogs, objects (like new plants or furniture), or odors into the home (like fireplace logs or a visitor's purse or boots); people moving into or out of the home; a big social change (e.g., divorce, a baby born, the death of a favored dog or cat); or moving to a new home. Cats who spray near doors and windows may be marking in response to other cats coming onto the property. Any changes in the environment that lead to an increase in anxiety or uncertainty can also cause marking (like remodeling, redecorating, or getting a new roommate).



Why Do Cats Stop Using Their Box?

Cats may avoid the litter box or prefer locations or surfaces not associated with the box for many reasons, the most common of which include

- Medical problems;
- Unclean litter box;
- Dirty litter;
- Not enough litter boxes;
- Being confronted in the litter box by a family dog, cat, or human (some owners try to give a cat medication or trim his/her nails while the cat is eliminating);
- Undesirable litter (type, depth, or scent) or an undesirable litter box (height, cover, self-cleaning mechanism, or litter liner);
- Undesirable litter box location (insufficient privacy or near a noisy appliance or furnace);
- Preferred feel or comfort of a surface or location other than the litter box.

What to Do: Basic Tips

Scoop all litter boxes daily and replace the litter at least weekly, even if the litter is marketed as long-lasting or for multiple cats. If your cat uses the litter almost as soon as it is changed and the box cleaned, your cat loves a clean, fresh litter box environment. Provide at least one litter box per cat plus one extra.

To determine which litter type your cat prefers, offer two or three different options side by side to see which one he uses most (clay, clumping, recycled paper, scented, unscented, different brands, sand or soil, different depths). Then place the preferred litter into different boxes to determine which type he prefers (different heights, different openings, with or without a litter liner, covered or uncovered, self-cleaning). Once you identify a litter and box your cat might use, put this litter in two of the preferred boxes in two places to see if your cat is happier with either location. If you want your cat to use the box, find out what he likes and needs.

Marking Solutions

Cats that have not been castrated or spayed are most likely to spray, so neutering is the first step in the treatment for marking. If your cat is spraying when other cats come onto your property, move anything that might attract stray cats (garbage cans, feeding stations, or bird feeders). Keep your cat away from doors and windows, put up blinds or shutters on the windows, make it difficult for visiting cats to stand on or near windows and doors (e.g., barriers, rocks that do not offer comfortable perches), or use additional methods of keeping other cats away from your home. Marking can be a flag of social stress in and around the household. Your veterinarian and/or a veterinary behaviorist will be able to help you sort out the social complexity in your household and identify any situations that are stressful and anxiety provoking for your cat. These situations will need to be addressed as part of the treatment for marking.

Synthetic feline pheromones may be effective at reducing anxiety and marking. No medications are licensed for the treatment of feline urine marking; however, a number of human and dog medications might be effective. Your veterinarian can explain the benefits, risks, and use.

Housesoiling Solutions

Most cats will seek out litter boxes. If you are attempting to convince a cat to try a new litter, box, or location, at first confine him with his litter box in a small area of the home where he does not soil. If the cat decides he likes the box, litter, or location, he will use it. Studies have shown that cats prefer large litter boxes—1.5 times their body lengths—and clean litter.

Once the cat is reliably using the box, he can gradually have access to the rest of the house, once any areas previously soiled have been cleaned. Cleaning may need to be repeated until the cat shows no interest in the odors in the area. Until then, gates, doors, and barriers can prevent the cat from focusing on areas where he still detects old elimination odors. Understanding your cat's daily elimination routine

can help you determine if or when he will need to be confined or supervised. Observing your cat's behavior will also tell you if there are social interactions that are problematic for your cat. Inexpensive web cameras have made watching your cat in your absence simple.

Physical and verbal punishment plays no role in getting your cat to use his litter box. Whether the problem is spraying or toileting, your cat is not eliminating in the house because he is disobedient or "spiteful" or angry. Any kind of punishment will just damage your relationship with your cat. Be careful with the use of any remote deterrent devices that could scare the cat. Worried and scared cats are often those who stop using their litter boxes, anyway, so such interventions will worsen the situation from the cat's perspective.

Evaluate the litter box location, litter type, cleaning schedule, and any other factors that might deter litter box use. If your cat is soiling in one or two specific areas, it might be possible to move the litter box to that area and see if he uses it. If he uses the box, leave it there for a while and then very slowly move it to a preferred place, if necessary. Cats who like soft surfaces (e.g., rugs, mats, clothes) can often be convinced to use very clean, particulate, soft litter, like most modern flushable or compostable litters. Cats who like cool, hard, reflective surfaces may do well with empty or tiled litter boxes. The key to solving the problem is to find a solution that meets your individual cat's needs. Cats who like their litter boxes spend more time in them and dig in them, spending less time perching on the edge and digging outside the box. Let your cat's behavior be your guide.

If these steps do not solve the problem, consult your veterinarian for further guidance.

The AAHA behavior brochures were developed by a team of veterinarians and certified veterinary behaviorists to reflect best practices as outlined in the *2015 AAHA Canine and Feline Behavior Management Guidelines*, available at aaha.org/professional/resources/behavior2015.aspx.

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Destructive Cats

Solving Chewing and Scratching Problems

AAHA press

PET BEHAVIOR BROCHURE SERIES

Most cats have a strong natural desire to explore. Kittens, especially those younger than 12 weeks of age, love to play and can turn any plant, piece of clothing, or furniture into an object for play. Older cats may keep the sheaths of their claws fresh by scratching the sofa, and curious cats can get into and damage houseplants. The best way to prevent destructive chewing and scratching is by providing an environment that meets all of your cat's needs.

Exploration and Play

The first consideration is that the environment be stimulating but safe. Cat-proof your home and build or purchase a play center where your cat can climb, perch, and scratch. Cleverly designed cat condos can become elevated play areas with the addition of some hanging feather toys or food puzzles. Some cats enjoy climbing into empty cardboard boxes or cat carriers, especially if food treats have been left inside. Cat toys need not be expensive, but are best if they stimulate normal cat behaviors of following, chasing, and pouncing. There are commercial toys that meet these needs, or you can make your own cat toys using stretchy or elasticized ropes to which you can attach feathers or toys. Ping-pong balls and unshelled walnuts make inexpensive toys that many cats love.

Left to themselves, cats would hunt and eat several small meals a day. One of the best ways to provice additional stimulation is to make feeding more like the natural feeding behavior of cats by providing numerous small meals each day and by encouraging play that includes batting, chasing, and pouncing. This can be accomplished by placing some or all of your cat's food inside toys that require rolling, batting, or pawing to release the food. Cats love food puzzles, and there are many commercially available toys that require cats to pull, push, or use their paws to manipulate some part of the toy to release a small amount of food. If your cat likes to jump and climb, and to use his nose, you can use old egg cartons to place a few pieces of kibble on shelves where your cat will find them.

Another great way to stimulate your cat and provide an outlet for hunting is to engage in a number of interactive play sessions each day. These might include throwing or rolling toys (which could contain food) or the use of toys like feathers or thick ribbons that are attached to wands or sticks to entice your cat to chase and grab the toys. Teaching cats to focus on toys and not human hands and feet is important since cats can accidentally claw or bite people in play if people play with them using their hands or feet. Avoid tempting your kitten into play by teasing him with your fingers—you may end up with a play-b ting cat.

Preventing Chewing Problems

Indoor cats with little access to grass or other vegetable matter may chew houseplants, some of which may be toxic to them. One solution is to grow a cat herb garden (these are available commercially). Cat grass and catnip can be grown practically anywhere with little effort. If you see your cat start to chew your houseplants, don't yell at or punish the cat. Substitute a plant that was grown for the cat and reward the cat (verbally and/or with a treat) for using it. Then keep your plants out of the cat's reach unless you are around to supervise.

Young cats and kittens may like to chew and sometimes suckle some fabrics. The medical risk with these behaviors is that a foreign object—the fabric—can cause an intestinal obstruction in the cat, which is a medical emergency. Watch kittens and young cats to see what they do, and check all exposed fabrics and items of interest regularly for saliva and tooth marks. You may be able to redirect many of these behaviors to toys, as discussed above. Sometimes more roughage in the cat's diet can help. Sometimes, giving them something to chew (a dog's chew toy or a sterilized bone stuffed with food) may help. Some breeds, such as Siamese and Burmese, have a genetic tendency to suck and chew excessive y, particularly on wool, and especially when othe~wise stressed. If problems persist, consult your veterinarian.



To keep your cat away from problem areas, first try child locks, barricades, or closed doors. Never use physical punishment or yelling—it may cause your cat to fear you and he will almost certainly learn to avoid the problem area only when you are around.

If you have a cat who seeks and chews wires or cables, encase these inside piping or tubing to protect your cat. If redirecting your cat doesn't work, and you cannot restrict him from the area, you may succeed in making the area less appealing by making it harder to get to through the use of gates, or less desirable by placing mint- or citrus-scented objects (candles, soap) within the area. If all of these steps fail and your cat is still determined to chew, consider a visit to your veterinarian to ensure that your cat does not have a medical or behavioral problem.

Preventing Scratching Problems

Scratching is a normal behavior that allows your cat to condition his claws and leave social scent signals using the glands in his feet. It also provides a nice stretch. Of course, when your cat's scratching is on furniture or some other place or item where you do not wish for him to scratch, this is now a problem for you—and potentially a problem for your cat. Resolution of the problem behavior involves early intervention and providing your cat with a suitable (for you) and a desirable (for the cat) replacement for the items or locations being scratched.

Remember that a lot of feline scratching is about social signaling. Purchase or make a scratching post that has a texture similar to that of the substrate on which the cat is scratching and put it near the area where the cat has scratched. Also put out other scratching posts, and if you see the cat scratching, reward him. You can put some treats in or on the scratching posts, and you can also attract your cat by rubbing fish oil on the posts. For cats who respond to and enjoy catnip (not all do), catnip can be sprinkled or rubbed on the scratching post. Cat-scratching walls can be made by covering anchored pieces of plywood with thick fabrics, rope or fiber rugs, or

other coverings. If the new objects meet the cat's social and behavioral needs and appeal to his texture preference, he will come to use them if rewarded for doing so. You can also construct an inexpensive scratching post by securely attaching a fireplace log to a plywood base, or, if you have the space, you can try to incorporate a washed branch into your decor.

Persistent Scratching Problems

If your cat continues to scratch in an inappropriate area, put a post there. Food rewards for scratching the post should keep your cat more interested in the post than in your furniture. If destructive scratching persists, cover the scratched area with plastic, a loosely draped piece of material that the cat finds unappealing, or double-sided tape. Remember that one part of the reason for scratching is to remove old nail sheaths, so keeping nails trimmed or covered in nail caps may help. Nail caps fit over the cat's nails and protect people and furniture but still require that nails are routinely trimmed and the caps replaced, generally by your cat's veterinarian.

Since scratching can be a form of marking, a feline cheek-gland pheromone spray or diffuser might be helpful for stopping this behavior when used in your home. You may want to discuss this option with your veterinarian.

One important thing to keep in mind is that before you try to prevent or stop what you think is undesirable scratching behavior, first make sure that you have met the cat's needs and provided enough outlets for play, places to climb, and appropriate items to scratch.