



# Your New Kitten Kit

Everything you need for your kitten's first year with us

Congratulations on your new kitten. This guide brings together everything we normally hand out at your visits — your kitten's wellness and vaccine schedule, bringing your kitten home, feeding, deworming, spay/neuter, common household hazards, and pet insurance. Save it to your phone so it's always handy.

## What's Inside

|                                                       |         |
|-------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| 1. Kitten Wellness Program (vaccines & exam schedule) | page 2  |
| 2. Bringing Your Kitten Home                          | page 4  |
| 3. Feeding Your Kitten & Cat                          | page 9  |
| 4. Why We Deworm Puppies and Kittens                  | page 11 |
| 5. Spaying and Neutering Your Pet                     | page 13 |
| 6. Toxic Foods, Plants & Chemicals for Cats           | page 16 |
| 7. Declawing                                          | page 19 |
| 8. A Less Stressful Vet Visit for Your Cat            | page 21 |
| 9. Pet Insurance for Your New Puppy or Kitten         | page 23 |

### Navigating this guide

Tap any section above to jump straight to it. On computers and most phones, the bookmarks menu (also called "outline") lists every section as well. Questions about anything in here? Call us at (636) 227-7154 — we're happy to help.



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## Kitten Wellness Program

Recommended vaccination and preventive care schedule

| Age         | Visit                                                       | Vaccines & Preventive Care                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6–8 Weeks   | New kitten exam<br>Weight check                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>FeLV/FIV test</b></li><li>• Intestinal parasite screen (stool sample)</li><li>• 1st <b>FVRCP</b></li><li>• Pyrantel (dewormer) — repeat in 10 days</li></ul> |
| 10–12 Weeks | Progress exam<br>Weight check                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2nd <b>FVRCP</b></li><li>• 1st <b>FeLV</b> (feline leukemia)</li><li>• Start monthly flea/tick and heartworm prevention</li><li>• Re-dose pyrantel</li></ul>    |
| 14–16 Weeks | Progress exam<br>Weight check<br>Intestinal parasite screen | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 3rd (final) <b>FVRCP</b> — must be given at or after 16 weeks</li><li>• 2nd <b>FeLV</b></li><li>• <b>Rabies</b> (1 year)</li></ul>                              |

FVRCP = Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis (herpesvirus), Calicivirus, Panleukopenia

FeLV/FIV test: We test every kitten once at the first visit to know their status. Kittens that will go outdoors or live with other cats should be vaccinated against FeLV; indoor-only cats may still benefit — we'll discuss lifestyle with you.

### Annual Boosters (Adult Cats)

- Office visit / physical exam
- Rabies (1 year or 3 year)
- Heartworm/FeLV test
- FVRCP (1 year or 3 year)
- Intestinal parasite screen (stool sample)
- FeLV — every year for at-risk cats
- Weight check
- Year-round flea/tick and heartworm prevention

### Additional Recommendations

- **Spay / neuter:** Please refer to the attached spay/neuter document. For cats, we recommend by 5 months of age.
- **Microchip:** We recommend microchipping at the time of spay/neuter — it is the single best way to reunite a lost cat with your family.

- **Nutrition:** Feed a complete and balanced kitten food until 12 months of age, then transition to an adult maintenance diet.
- **Seniors:** When your cat reaches senior age (10+), we recommend an examination every 6 months with routine bloodwork.
- **Lifestyle vaccines:** Ask us about additional protection if your cat will board or spend significant time outdoors.

This schedule follows the current [AAFP Feline Vaccination Guidelines](#) and [AAHA/AAFP Feline Vaccination Guidelines](#). Individual protocols may be adjusted based on your kitten's health, lifestyle, and risk of exposure. Please call us at (636) 227-7154 with any questions.



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# Bringing Your Kitten Home

Setting up, enriching their environment, and introducing them to your household

## Five keys to a smooth start

1. **Start small.** One quiet room for the first few days, not the whole house.
2. **Vertical space** — cat trees, perches, and shelves so your kitten can climb and observe.
3. **Feed on a schedule** with hunting-style enrichment (see below).
4. **Scratching posts before you need them** — one tall vertical and one horizontal.
5. **Reward-based training** — no punishment, ever.

## The First Few Days

A new home is overwhelming for a kitten. Confining your kitten to one **safe room** (a spare bedroom or bathroom) for the first 3–7 days lets them learn where their food, water, litter box, and bed are before they have to navigate the whole house. Include hiding places, a scratching post, toys, and something soft with your scent. Visit often for short, calm interactions. When your kitten is confidently exploring the room and using the litter box reliably, open the door and let them expand their territory on their own schedule.

## Environmental Enrichment

An enriched environment increases activity, decreases mental stagnation, and prevents many behavior problems. Cats need mental stimulation just as much as physical exercise — a bored indoor cat is a stressed indoor cat.

### Vertical space and hiding spots

Vertical space is highly desirable for cats and increases the useful area of your home. Provide **cat trees with perches and hiding spots**, wall-mounted shelves, or a cleared-off bookshelf. Boxes, paper bags (handles removed), and carriers left out provide safe retreats.

### Hunting-style feeding

Cats in the wild eat **10–20 small meals per day**. Making all food available in a bowl cuts foraging time to a few minutes and is a major driver of feline obesity and its associated diseases. To make feeding more natural:

- Use **food puzzles, interactive food toys, and food balls**
- Make homemade puzzles from a cardboard box or plastic bottle with holes cut into it
- **Hide food in different places** around the house so your cat can "hunt" for it

### Play and interactive toys

Play with your cat **several times a day** using wand toys, feather toys, and toy mice — anything they can stalk and catch. Rotate the toys weekly so they stay interesting, and finish play with a small treat or meal so your cat experiences the natural hunt-catch-eat sequence. Solitary indoor cats need this most.

### Social companionship

Cats are social animals — they need companionship and mental stimulation. That can come from gentle petting, grooming, feeding, and play with you, or from another compatible cat. If you are away most of the day, a second cat can help. In a **multi-cat home, set up separate stations** for litter boxes, food, and water throughout the house so cats can choose which path to take and which cat to greet or avoid.

### Cats can be trained

- Reward desired behavior with treats or positive attention
- Redirect undesired behavior; **never** **swat, slap, or yell**
- Train under calm, fun conditions using positive reinforcement
- Cats can learn "sit," "come," high-five, and many other cues — start with something they already like doing
- You can train them to tolerate teeth brushing, nail trims, and grooming, which pays off for the rest of their life



## Litter Box Care

Adapted from the [American Association of Feline Practitioners](#). Cats are naturally clean — most kittens learn litter box habits from their mother, and your job is to make it easy for them to keep succeeding.

- **Number:** One box per cat, plus one extra. Two cats = three boxes. Place them in at least two different locations and preferably more in multi-cat homes.
- **Size:** The box should be at least **1.5× the length of your cat**. Many commercial boxes are too small for adult cats — sweater storage bins, cement mixing tubs, and small dog litter pans (rated up to 35 lbs) all make excellent boxes.
- **Location:** Private, easy to access, and **never next to noisy appliances** (washer, dryer, furnace) or the food bowl. Provide **two ways in and out** so one cat can't trap another in the box. Never trap or corner a cat in the box for medication or handling.
- **Litter:** Most cats prefer **unscented, fine-grained clumping litter** about 1.5 inches deep — though preferences vary. Avoid strong perfumes and crystal litter until you know what your kitten likes.
- **Scoop 1–2 times daily.** Completely change clumping litter at least weekly (more often with multiple cats). Clay litter should be changed every other day at minimum. **Wash the box with warm soapy water** and dry well before adding new litter — **no bleach or ammonia** (the smell resembles urine).
- **Covered or open?** Most cats prefer open boxes. If you use a covered box, make sure your kitten can turn around inside comfortably.

*Normal for a cat: average of 2 urinations per day (± 2) and 1 defecation daily (up to 3–4 for outdoor cats). Some cats cover their eliminations; others don't. Both are normal.*

## If Your Kitten Has an Accident

Eliminating outside the box often signals an underlying medical or environmental problem. The earlier the cause is identified, the better the chance your cat returns to the litter box. **Never punish your kitten** — punishment makes cats hide their elimination, not use the box.

- **Rule out medical first.** Sudden accidents, straining, blood in urine, or crying in the box can mean a urinary tract infection, crystals, or (in males) a life-threatening urethral obstruction. Call us the same day.
- **Clean thoroughly with an enzymatic cleaner** (Nature's Miracle, Anti-Icky-Poo). Regular household cleaners don't fully break down urine proteins — your kitten can still smell the spot and will return to it.
- **Re-check the basics:** box too dirty? too small? too close to the food bowl? new litter your kitten dislikes? another pet blocking access?
- **Stress** is a common trigger — new pet, new baby, moving, remodeling. Extra play, vertical space, and Feliway pheromone diffusers help.



## Handling & Socialization

The window when kittens are most receptive to new experiences is roughly **2 to 9 weeks**, with lasting benefit through 4 months. Gentle, positive exposure now creates a confident adult cat.

- Handle paws, ears, mouth, and tail daily — brief, calm, followed by a treat. This makes future nail trims, dental care, and veterinary visits far easier.
- Get your kitten used to the **carrier** now: leave it out with a blanket inside, feed meals in it, take short car rides that don't end at the vet. (See our separate Vet Visit handout for details.)
- Expose your kitten to common household sounds, other calm pets, and different people at their own pace. Let them retreat if overwhelmed.
- **Don't use hands as toys.** Rough play now teaches a kitten that hands are toys — which becomes a scratching and biting problem later. Redirect to wand toys and kickers.
- **Prevent startle.** Make small, regular changes to the environment so novelty is normal. For bigger changes (a new pet, baby, or move), introduce your cat gradually to a small, familiar space first before expanding.

## Introducing a New Cat to a Household with Existing Cats

Adapted from the American Association of Feline Practitioners. Introductions take time — most cat-to-cat introductions take **2–4 weeks**, and older cats may need longer.

- **Step 1 — Isolate.** Put the new cat in a separate room with its own food, water, litter box, and toys. Both cats adjust to the sound and smell of the other before ever seeing each other. Have both cats health-checked before any direct contact.
- **Step 2 — Scent swap.** Exchange bedding between the cats and rub a soft cloth on each cat's cheeks (where scent glands are) and leave it in the other's space. Reward calm, curious behavior with treats and praise.
- **Step 3 — Under-the-door contact.** Once both cats are calm, allow brief interaction through a cracked door or baby gate. Feed both cats on either side of a closed door so the smell of the other is paired with something positive.
- **Step 4 — Supervised meetings.** Start with one cat in a carrier and the other free to approach. Feed both at the same time to reduce stress. Gradually increase supervised time together, always ending on a calm, positive note.
- **Never leave cats together unsupervised** until many supervised visits have gone by without any aggression.
- **Pheromone products** (Feliway MultiCat, Feliway Optimum) can ease introductions when used alongside the gradual process above — not as a shortcut.

## When to Call Us

### **Call the same day for any of these:**

- Straining in the litter box, crying, or no urine produced (especially in male kittens — this can be a life-threatening obstruction)
- Vomiting or diarrhea lasting more than 24 hours, or blood in either
- Not eating for 24 hours (cats develop liver problems quickly when they stop eating)
- Sneezing, runny eyes/nose, or lethargy that doesn't resolve in a day or two
- Any suspected toxin exposure (see the toxins handout)

*Questions about your kitten? Call us at (636) 227-7154, text (636) 242-5932, or visit [www.ellisvillevet.com](http://www.ellisvillevet.com).*



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# Feeding Your Kitten & Cat

What to feed, how often, and how to keep a healthy weight for life

## The five feeding rules for cats

1. Feed a **complete and balanced kitten food** until 1 year of age.
2. Feed **wet food twice a day** plus a measured amount of dry left between meals.
3. Measure the food — free-feeding an unlimited bowl is the #1 cause of feline obesity.
4. Fresh water always available; many cats prefer a fountain or wide, shallow bowl.
5. Any diet change should be a **gradual 7-10 day transition** to avoid GI upset.

## What to Feed

We recommend a highly digestible, name-brand food formulated for kittens — examples include **Science Diet, Purina Pro Plan, Royal Canin**, and **Iams** kitten formulas. These diets contain higher levels of protein, fat, calcium, and DHA that growing kittens need. Feed kitten food until **1 year of age**, then transition to an adult maintenance diet.

**A note on grain-free diets:** The FDA has investigated a link between certain grain-free diets (especially those high in peas, lentils, and other legumes) and dilated cardiomyopathy in dogs; while the evidence in cats is limited, we generally recommend **grain-inclusive diets** from established manufacturers with veterinary nutritionists on staff. If you have any questions about your cat's food, please ask our team.

## Wet Food vs. Dry Food

For cats, feeding **wet food twice a day helps prevent urinary problems and obesity**. Cats are obligate carnivores that evolved to get most of their water from prey — they don't drink enough on their own to compensate for a dry-only diet. We recommend a limited amount of wet food twice daily, with a measured amount of dry food left out between meals rather than a bottomless bowl.

## How Much and How Often

| Age        | Meals per day | Notes                                                                                   |
|------------|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6–12 weeks | 3–4           | Small, frequent meals — kittens can develop low blood sugar if meals are too far apart. |
| 3–6 months | 3             | Growing fast; kitten food only.                                                         |

|                         |     |                                                                        |
|-------------------------|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>6–12 months</b>      | 2–3 | Still on kitten food. Weight-check at each visit.                      |
| <b>1 year and older</b> | 2   | Adult maintenance food, measured portions. Wet food twice daily.       |
| <b>Seniors (10+)</b>    | 2   | Consider a senior formula; watch for weight loss (can signal disease). |

*Always start with the feeding guide on the food label based on your cat's weight, and adjust up or down based on body condition. If you can't easily feel your cat's ribs, they're overweight.*

## Transitioning to a New Food

Whenever you change foods, mix the new food with the old for 7–10 days to prevent vomiting or diarrhea:

- **Days 1–2:** 75% old food, 25% new
- **Days 3–4:** 50% old, 50% new
- **Days 5–6:** 25% old, 75% new
- **Day 7 and after:** 100% new food

## Weight Matters

### Why we keep talking about weight

Cats at a normal weight live an average of **2 years longer** than overweight cats and have significantly fewer health problems — diabetes, arthritis, urinary disease, and skin conditions are all far more common in overweight cats. It is much easier to keep your cat at a healthy weight than to help them lose it later. If your cat is putting on weight, talk to us early about portion adjustments or a therapeutic weight-management diet.

*Questions about your cat's diet? Call us at (636) 227-7154 or ask at your next visit.*



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# Why We Deworm Puppies and Kittens

Common intestinal parasites, why they matter, and how we protect your family

From an early age, puppies and kittens can host numerous intestinal parasites. Some worms are passed from the mother through the placenta or in milk; others are picked up from the soil or environment. Several of these parasites are **zoonotic** — meaning they can be transmitted to humans. Children and immunocompromised people are at the greatest risk of picking up worms from their pets.

## What we ask of you

To limit your family's risk, please bring a **fresh fecal sample** to the **first and last puppy/kitten visits**. This lets us screen for intestinal parasites directly. Because worm eggs may not be shed in every sample, your doctor will typically still administer a dewormer to protect against the most common parasites. After the puppy/kitten series, a fecal sample should be checked **yearly**. Pets on year-round heartworm preventatives are at lower risk of picking up intestinal parasites.

## Common Intestinal Parasites

### ROUNDWORMS

**How it spreads:** Passed through the placenta, in milk, by ingestion of eggs from the environment, or through eating an intermediate host.

**Signs in your pet:** Pot-bellied appearance, dull hair coat, failure to thrive, vomiting, or diarrhea. Worms may sometimes be visible in the feces.

**Risk to humans:** Visceral larval migrans — a serious condition (especially in children) where worm larvae migrate through body tissues. Can damage the intestines, lungs, or eyes.

### HOOKWORMS

**How it spreads:** Through the placenta, in milk, by ingestion of larvae, by skin penetration, or by ingestion of intermediate hosts.

**Signs in your pet:** Diarrhea (which can be bloody), weakness, failure to thrive, dehydration, and anemia.

**Risk to humans:** Can be transmitted by ingestion or skin penetration, causing severe skin rashes and intestinal problems.

## WHIPWORMS

**How it spreads:** Ingestion of worm eggs from contaminated soil or environment.

**Signs in your pet:** Diarrhea, blood in the stool, weight loss, and failure to thrive. Adult animals can be affected as well as puppies and kittens.

**Risk to humans:** Human infection with the canine species is very rare, but good hygiene is still important.

## COCCIDIA

**How it spreads:** A protozoan parasite transmitted by ingestion of oocysts shed in feces. Very common in kennel or cattery environments.

**Signs in your pet:** Often asymptomatic; when signs appear they include diarrhea (sometimes with mucus or blood), weight loss, or dehydration.

**Risk to humans:** The canine and feline species (*Cystoisospora*) are host-specific and not considered zoonotic.

## TAPEWORMS

**How it spreads:** Ingestion of fleas or lice, or by eating tissue from an infected animal.

**Signs in your pet:** Usually no clinical signs of disease, but tapeworm segments can be seen in the pet's feces or around their anus — they look like grains of rice.

**Risk to humans:** Accidental ingestion of an infected flea can transmit *Dipylidium* tapeworm, most commonly seen in young children.

*Deworming recommendations follow current Companion Animal Parasite Council (CAPC) guidelines. If you notice worms in your pet's stool, changes in appetite or stool, or any of the signs above, please call us at (636) 227-7154.*



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# Spaying and Neutering Your Pet

Benefits, recommended timing, and what to expect the day of surgery

Spaying and neutering are among the most important preventive-care decisions you'll make for your pet. Beyond preventing unwanted litters, these procedures offer real, lifelong health and behavior benefits. Current guidelines recognize that the **best age** to spay or neuter depends on your pet's **species, sex, and adult body size** — this handout walks you through what we recommend and what happens on surgery day.

## Recommended Timing

Based on the 2024 AAHA Canine Life Stage Guidelines and current AAFP feline consensus. For large and giant-breed dogs, waiting until skeletal maturity reduces the risk of orthopedic disease and certain cancers.

| Pet                                   | Females (Spay)                                               | Males (Neuter)                                               |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cats                                  | By 5 months of age                                           | By 5 months of age                                           |
| Small dogs<br>Under 45 lbs            | 6–12 months, ideally before the first heat                   | Around 6 months                                              |
| Large & giant dogs<br>45 lbs and over | Wait until <b>after the first heat</b> and skeletal maturity | Wait until <b>skeletal maturity</b> , typically 18–24 months |

*Timing may be adjusted for individual patients based on breed-specific disease risk, health status, and lifestyle. Pets with diabetes or epilepsy should be spayed to prevent hormonal changes that can interfere with medication.*

## Benefits of Spaying Female Pets

Spaying involves removing the reproductive organs. Depending on the case, we perform either an **ovariectomy** (ovaries only) or an **ovariohysterectomy** (ovaries and uterus) — both are equally effective at preventing pregnancy and hormonal disease.

- **Significantly reduces** the risk of mammary (breast) cancer — greatest protection when spayed before the first heat cycle.
- **Eliminates** the risk of ovarian and uterine cancer.
- **Eliminates** the risk of pyometra — a life-threatening uterine infection.
- Eliminates heat cycles and the mess, behavior changes, and unwanted attention that come with them.

- Prevents unwanted litters.

## Benefits of Neutering Male Pets

Neutering involves removal of the testicles and spermatic cord.

- **Eliminates** the risk of testicular cancer — the second-most-common tumor in intact male dogs.
- **Greatly reduces** the risk of prostate disease and prostatitis.
- Reduces roaming and fighting behavior.
- Reduces or eliminates urine marking and spraying.
- Eliminates the risk of transmitting sexually transmitted diseases.
- Prevents unwanted litters.

## Common Myths

### Spaying and neutering do NOT:

- Cause laziness or hyperactivity
- Reduce your pet's instinct to protect family or home
- Cause immature behavior or postpone behavioral maturity
- Alter your pet's personality

## What to Expect the Day of Surgery

At Ellisville Veterinary Hospital, every spay and neuter is performed in a sterile surgical suite with the same standard of care we would want for our own pets.

### Pre-anesthetic bloodwork

**Every patient** receives pre-anesthetic bloodwork to confirm the liver, kidneys, and other organs are functioning properly and that anesthesia can be safely administered.

### Anesthesia and airway

Your pet is anesthetized and an endotracheal tube is placed to maintain oxygen and anesthetic gas. (The only exception is male cats, where we use oxygen and anesthetic gas without a tracheal tube.)

### IV catheter and fluids

An IV catheter is placed and fluids run throughout the procedure to support blood pressure and organ function.

### Surgical prep

The surgical area is clipped of hair and a full sterile surgical scrub is performed.

### Warmth and monitoring

Your pet is placed on a heated water blanket to maintain body temperature. A dedicated technician monitors respiration, heart rate, blood oxygen level, body temperature, and ECG throughout the entire procedure.

### Sterile surgery

The surgeon is capped and gowned and uses a sterile surgical pack to perform the procedure.

### **Recovery and pain control**

A technician monitors your pet during recovery until they are fully awake. **Every patient goes home with pain medication** to keep them comfortable during healing.

### **Going home**

Most pets are fully recovered and ready to go home after 3 PM on the day of surgery.

*Our staff is happy to answer any questions about spaying or neutering your pet — or any other procedure. Please don't hesitate to reach out at (636) 227-7154 or [www.ellisvillevet.com](http://www.ellisvillevet.com).*



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# Toxic Foods, Plants & Chemicals for Cats

What to keep away from your cat — and what to do if they get into it

## If you suspect a poisoning — call immediately

**Ellisville Veterinary Hospital:** (636) 227-7154

**ASPCA Animal Poison Control:** (888) 426-4435 (24/7, consultation fee)

**Pet Poison Helpline:** (855) 764-7661 (24/7, consultation fee)

**Bring the packaging or a photo** of what your cat ate. Do not induce vomiting unless a veterinarian or poison control tells you to.

Cats are not small dogs — they metabolize many drugs and toxins very differently. Some substances that are safe (or only mildly toxic) for dogs are **life-threatening** for cats. This handout covers the most common feline poisonings we see; when in doubt, call.

## Especially Dangerous for Cats

### LILIES (True lilies & daylilies)

**The #1 cat poison we see.** Every part of the plant — petals, leaves, pollen, even the vase water — can cause acute kidney failure in cats. Includes Easter, Tiger, Stargazer, Asiatic, Oriental, and Daylilies. **Even a nibbled leaf or licked pollen off fur is an emergency.** Peace lilies and Calla lilies are less dangerous but still cause mouth irritation and drooling.

### ESSENTIAL OILS & DIFFUSERS

Cats lack the liver enzyme (glucuronyl transferase) to safely process most essential oils. Especially toxic: **tea tree (melaleuca), pennyroyal, wintergreen, pine, eucalyptus, citrus, cinnamon, clove, peppermint, ylang ylang.** Passive diffusers are generally safe in a well-ventilated room; active/nebulizing diffusers, undiluted oils on skin or fur, and direct ingestion can be lethal.

### ACETAMINOPHEN (Tylenol)

**Never** give Tylenol to a cat. Cats cannot metabolize acetaminophen — even a single regular-strength tablet can be fatal, causing red blood cell damage (methemoglobinemia) and liver failure. Signs: brown/blue gums, swollen face or paws, difficulty breathing.

### NSAIDs (Ibuprofen, Naproxen, Aspirin)

Extremely narrow safety margin in cats. Cause kidney failure, stomach ulcers, and bleeding. Never give any human pain reliever to a cat without veterinary direction.

## PERMETHRIN & PYRETHROIDS

Found in many **dog** flea/tick products (spot-ons, sprays, collars). Applying a dog product to a cat — or a cat grooming a recently-treated dog — causes tremors, seizures, and death. **Only use flea/tick products labeled for cats.**

## Toxic Foods

- **Onions, garlic, chives, leeks** (all forms — raw, cooked, powdered) — cause anemia in cats
- **Grapes and raisins** — can cause kidney failure
- **Chocolate** — theobromine is toxic; darker chocolate is worse
- **Xylitol / "birch sugar" / "birch sap"** — found in sugar-free gum, candy, some peanut butters, baked goods, toothpaste (less dangerous to cats than dogs but still avoid)
- **Alcohol** — even small amounts cause severe toxicity
- **Raw yeast dough** — expands in the stomach and produces alcohol
- **Caffeine** (coffee, tea, energy drinks) — causes tremors and cardiac problems
- **Raw fish (long-term)** — thiaminase destroys vitamin B1, causing neurologic disease
- **Milk and dairy** — most adult cats are lactose intolerant; not toxic but causes diarrhea

## Toxic Plants — common household & garden species

- **Lilies** (see above — the biggest one)
- **Sago palm** — every part is toxic, seeds are worst; causes liver failure
- **Tulip and daffodil bulbs** — highest concentration in bulbs
- **Azalea and rhododendron** — cardiac toxins
- **Oleander** — cardiac glycosides, all parts toxic
- **Autumn crocus** — GI upset, organ damage
- **Dieffenbachia, philodendron, pothos** — oral irritation, drooling, difficulty swallowing
- **Yew** — cardiac toxin
- **Cyclamen** — GI upset; heart rhythm issues if roots ingested

For a searchable list of all plants toxic and non-toxic to cats, see the [ASPCA Toxic and Non-Toxic Plant List](#).

## Household & Garden Chemicals

- **Antifreeze (ethylene glycol)** — sweet-tasting; even a teaspoon can kill a cat. Store securely and clean spills immediately
- **Rodenticides (rat/mouse poison)** — anticoagulants, bromethalin, cholecalciferol — all deadly; secondary poisoning possible if your cat eats a poisoned rodent
- **Cleaning products** — bleach, ammonia, toilet-bowl cleaners, drain cleaners, concentrated disinfectants (especially phenol-based like Lysol)
- **Lawn and garden chemicals** — insecticides, snail/slug bait (metaldehyde), fertilizers, herbicides
- **Human medications** — antidepressants (SSRIs), ADHD meds, heart meds, sleep aids, vitamins with iron/vitamin D
- **Recreational substances** — marijuana and THC edibles (often paired with chocolate or xylitol — a triple threat)
- **String, ribbon, tinsel, hair ties, rubber bands** — not chemical, but cats swallow these easily and they cause life-threatening intestinal obstructions ("linear foreign body") that require surgery

*When in doubt, call. It is always safer — and usually cheaper — to catch a poisoning early. Please save this handout somewhere you can find it quickly.*

# Declawing

Why we don't recommend it — and what to do instead

## Our position

The American Animal Hospital Association and the American Association of Feline Practitioners both **strongly oppose** the elective declawing of domestic cats. Ellisville Veterinary Hospital shares that position. This handout explains why, and what alternatives work.

## Why Cats Scratch

Scratching is **normal, essential feline behavior** — not misbehavior. Cats scratch to:

- Condition their claws by shedding the outer sheaths
- Scent-mark objects with glands in their paws
- Visually mark objects by leaving shredded material as evidence
- Stretch and exercise their forelegs, shoulders, and back
- Enjoy a pleasant sensation — it feels good, the same way stretching does for us

## What Declawing Actually Is

Declawing (**onychectomy**) is not a nail trim — it is the **surgical amputation of the last bone of each toe**. In human terms, it is equivalent to cutting off every finger at the last knuckle. Because the third bone of the toe is removed with the claw, the procedure permanently changes how a cat walks, stretches, and balances.

## Known Risks and Long-Term Problems

### Declawing carries real, lifelong consequences

- **Surgical risks:** anesthetic complications, hemorrhage, infection, and post-operative pain — as with any major surgery.
- **Chronic pain:** studies show declawed cats have significantly higher rates of back pain, arthritis, and altered gait years after surgery.
- **Behavior problems:** declawed cats are more likely to bite (their primary defense) and more likely to avoid the litter box (sand and clay can hurt sensitive paws).
- **Not medically necessary:** the CDC does **not** recommend declawing to protect immunocompromised people from cat scratches.
- **Doesn't solve rehoming:** despite the assumption, declawed cats are still relinquished to shelters — often for the behavior problems declawing creates.

## What Works Instead

- **Provide the right scratching surfaces.** At least one **tall vertical post** (30+ inches, sturdy enough not to wobble) and one **horizontal cardboard scratcher**. Cover them in sisal rope, rough fabric, or wood — the materials cats naturally prefer.
- **Place them where your cat wants to scratch.** Near sleeping spots, near the couch, near doorways — not tucked away in a corner.
- **Positive reinforcement.** Reward every use with a treat, catnip, or praise. Never punish scratching — redirect to the acceptable surface.
- **Trim nails every 1–2 weeks.** We're happy to show you how, or trim them for you at any visit.
- **Nail caps** (Soft Paws) are vinyl covers glued over trimmed nails; they last 4–6 weeks and prevent damage without altering the cat.
- **Feline pheromones** (Feliway) reduce anxiety-driven scratching in stressed cats.
- **Furniture protection** — double-sided tape (Sticky Paws), plastic covers, or foil temporarily discourage scratching in specific spots while your cat learns to use the post.
- **Avoid rough play with hands and feet.** Rough play now teaches a kitten that hands are toys — which becomes a scratching and biting problem later.

*If you're worried about scratching in your home, please talk to us **before** resorting to surgery. In nearly every case, a combination of the strategies above solves the problem. When declawing is genuinely medically necessary (tumors, chronic infection), the procedure must follow current best-practice amputation standards with multi-modal pain control before, during, and after surgery.*



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# A Less Stressful Vet Visit for Your Cat

Carrier, car ride, and clinic tips — for kittens through seniors

For most cats, a trip to the vet is anything but routine — the carrier appears, the car rumbles, and the clinic smells like other animals. Fear-Free visits are as much about the 48 hours **before** the appointment as they are about the exam itself. Starting these habits when your kitten is young pays off for the rest of their life.

## Before You Leave the House — The Carrier

- **Always use a carrier.** Loose in the car is dangerous for you and terrifying for the cat.
- **Choose a hard-sided carrier with a removable top** (a "top-loading" carrier). We can examine most cats **inside** the bottom half — no need to drag them out.
- **Leave the carrier out year-round** as a piece of furniture. Put a soft blanket, favorite toys, and treats inside. Feed occasional meals in it. The goal: the carrier stops being a one-way ticket to the vet.
- **Spray with feline pheromone** (Feliway) 30 minutes before travel and let it dry. It noticeably calms most cats.
- **Warm the carrier** with a towel that smells like you, or one that has been in the dryer.

## The Car Ride

- **Don't feed for at least an hour before the trip** — an empty stomach reduces carsickness and vomiting.
- **Practice short rides** that don't end at the vet. Around the block, to a coffee shop, back home — followed by treats and calm attention. This teaches your cat that the carrier and the car don't always mean a vet visit.
- **Secure the carrier with a seatbelt** and keep the cabin quiet — low music, no sudden stops.
- **Cover the carrier with a light towel** during travel; the reduced visual stimulation helps most cats stay calm.
- **Talk to your vet** about pre-visit anti-anxiety medication (gabapentin is common and safe) if your cat is severely stressed. Given 1–2 hours before the appointment, it transforms visits for many cats.

## At the Clinic

- **Keep the carrier off the floor** — use a chair or the counter. Height reduces stress and keeps your cat away from curious dogs.

- **Speak softly and calmly.** Cats read your body language and voice — if you are anxious, they will be too.
- **Reward calm behavior** with treats and gentle praise in the lobby and exam room.
- **Let our team handle your cat during the exam.** Restraining or fighting handling raises anxiety and can lead to bites or scratches. We are trained to use minimal, low-stress handling.
- **Ask before every visit** what we can do differently to make it better. Some cats do best with the first appointment of the day, some prefer a dog-free exam room, some do better with pre-visit medication.

## Going Home & Multi-Cat Households

When you return home with multiple cats, expect some hissing — the vet cat smells unfamiliar. Wipe the returning cat with a soft towel that has both cats' scent on it, or use a Feliway spray. Keep them separated for a few hours if the introduction is tense, then reintroduce with treats and quiet time together.

*Adapted from the American Association of Feline Practitioners Cat-Friendly Practice guidelines. Questions about your cat's next visit? Call (636) 227-7154 or text (636) 242-5932 ahead of time so we can plan around them.*



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## Pet Insurance for Your New Puppy or Kitten

What it is, why now is the best time to enroll, and how to pick a good plan

### Why we recommend enrolling while they're young

Right now, your puppy or kitten is the perfect insurance candidate: **they have a clean medical record**. Pet insurance almost never covers pre-existing conditions — any illness or injury that shows signs before coverage starts is excluded, usually for life. Conditions like allergies, diabetes, hip dysplasia, heart disease, and arthritis are commonly excluded once they've appeared in the medical record. **Enrolling now means everything that develops later is covered**. Premiums are also at their lowest when your pet is young and healthy, and most plans let you lock in that rate structure for life.

### How Pet Insurance Works

Pet insurance is a health policy for your pet. Unlike human health insurance, most plans work on reimbursement: you pay the veterinary bill at your appointment, submit a claim, and the insurance company reimburses you a percentage of the covered costs. Most plans can be used at any licensed veterinarian — including our hospital and emergency clinics. Wellness care (vaccines, checkups, flea/tick prevention) is usually not included in a standard plan but can often be added as a separate rider.

### Five Terms to Know Before Comparing Plans

|                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Premium</b>                  | Your monthly payment. Lower premiums usually mean higher out-of-pocket costs when you actually file a claim.                                                                                                              |
| <b>Deductible</b>               | What you pay out of pocket each year before reimbursement starts (commonly \$100–\$500). Resets annually. Choose <b>annual</b> over per-incident deductibles.                                                             |
| <b>Reimbursement percentage</b> | The portion of the covered bill the insurer pays after your deductible — typically 70%, 80%, or 90%. Higher percentages cost more per month.                                                                              |
| <b>Annual limit</b>             | The maximum the plan pays per year — some plans are unlimited, others cap at \$5,000–\$15,000. Unlimited or high caps cost more but protect against major emergencies.                                                    |
| <b>Waiting period</b>           | The time between enrollment and when coverage begins — commonly 14 days for illness and 2–14 days for accidents. Some plans make orthopedic conditions (like knee ligament injuries) wait 6–12 months. Shorter is better. |

### What to Look For When Comparing Plans

|                                                       |                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comprehensive accident &amp; illness coverage</b>  | Covers injuries, illnesses, diagnostics, surgery, hospitalization, medications, and cancer treatment — not accidents alone.                   |
| <b>Hereditary &amp; congenital condition coverage</b> | Especially important for purebreds. Breed-related problems (hip dysplasia, heart disease, patellar luxation) should be covered, not excluded. |
| <b>Chronic &amp; long-term condition coverage</b>     | Confirm that ongoing conditions like diabetes or allergies are covered for life, not just in the first policy year.                           |

|                                   |                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Dental illness coverage</b>    | Many plans only cover dental accidents. Plans covering periodontal disease and dental extractions are worth the premium.           |
| <b>Exam fee coverage</b>          | Some plans cover the office visit fee for covered conditions; others only cover treatment.                                         |
| <b>Reasonable waiting periods</b> | 14 days or less for illness, minimal for accidents. Ask about orthopedic waiting periods and whether a vet exam can shorten them.  |
| <b>Rate increases with age</b>    | All premiums rise as pets age — ask each company how much and how often to expect increases. A cheap plan now can double by age 8. |
| <b>Claims process</b>             | Look for mobile app claims, direct deposit, fast turnaround (2–4 weeks or less), and read independent customer reviews.            |

## What Pet Insurance Usually Does NOT Cover

**Pre-existing conditions** (anything diagnosed or showing signs before enrollment — this is why enrolling early matters), routine wellness visits (unless added as a rider), elective and cosmetic procedures, breeding and pregnancy care, and some plans exclude specific breed conditions — read the exclusions section of any policy before buying. A few companies will reconsider a curable condition (like an ear infection) after it has been symptom-free for 180 days to 12 months, but chronic conditions are excluded permanently.

## Where to Start

|                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Get quotes from several companies</b>    | Costs vary widely by breed, age, and ZIP code — compare at least 3–4 plans with the same deductible and reimbursement percentage so you're comparing apples to apples.                                                                                |
| <b>2. Use independent review sites</b>         | Websites like <a href="https://www.petinsurancereview.com">petinsurancereview.com</a> collect verified customer reviews and complaints for the major insurers — real claims experiences tell you more than ads do.                                    |
| <b>3. Read the NAIC buyer's guide</b>          | The National Association of Insurance Commissioners publishes a free consumer guide to pet insurance at <a href="https://www.naic.org">naic.org</a> , and your state insurance department can tell you if a company is licensed and in good standing. |
| <b>4. Compare the actual sample policy</b>     | Before enrolling, read the policy's coverage summary, exclusions, and pre-existing condition definition. These vary more between companies than prices do.                                                                                            |
| <b>5. Enroll early, and don't let it lapse</b> | Coverage is cheapest and broadest now, while your pet is healthy. If a policy lapses, waiting periods restart — and anything that happened during the gap becomes pre-existing.                                                                       |

### Our role

We recommend pet insurance because it lets you make medical decisions based on what's best for your pet — not on cost. We don't endorse or receive anything from any insurance company, so if you have questions about what a plan covers or how it works with your pet's care, just ask. We're happy to send your pet's medical records to any insurer to support a claim.

Information current as of September 2026. Plan terms and pricing vary by company, state, and pet — always verify details in the actual policy before enrolling. Sources: National Association of Insurance Commissioners ([naic.org](https://www.naic.org)); ASPCA Pet Insurance; PetMD.