

Belmont County Animal Rescue League

Tips for First Time Cat Owners

Thank you for choosing to adopt a cat! As a first time cat owner, you may have several questions on the daily care your new pet will require. Here is some basic information about your new cat:

Food:

- Dry cat food helps in maintaining good dental health in cats.
- Wet cat food provides water content that your cat may not get otherwise.
- The most important thing is to feed a consistent good quality diet that meets all your pet's nutritional requirements. Look for food that has been tested by the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) or meets AAFCO requirements.
- It is important not to overfeed your pet. A good rule of thumb is to be able to easily feel the ribs. Also when viewing your pet from above and looking down on the spine you should be able to easily see a waist just behind the rib cage. Overweight animals are more susceptible to many health problems including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, arthritis and other joint disorders.
- Cat treats are also available. It is not important to your pet what kind of treat is given, they simply enjoy the act of receiving something special. "Healthy" treats such as carrots, unsalted plain rice cakes, or apple pieces work just as well as commercial treats. Remember that commercial treats are high in calories and should not be given in large quantities or as a main source of nutrition.

Litter Box: (for more information, see our handout on litter box care)

- Many cats prefer clumping litter. In general, 1 litter box per cat is recommended. Make sure the litter box is in a low traffic area of the house that is easily accessible by you and your cat at all times. Cats also prefer an uncovered litter box.
- The box should be scooped at least once a day, but scooping more often is great!
- The entire litter box should be changed once a week or whenever the box starts to smell. If you are cleaning the box use a mild detergent without a harsh scent as cats can be sensitive to new smells.

Scratching Assistance: (for more information, see our handout on destructive scratching)

- Scratching is natural and essential to your cat's well-being. Scratching also exercises and stretches many muscles in the cat's legs.
- Scratching posts, scratching pads (corrugated cardboard that can be sprinkled with catnip), no scratch sprays/repellants, and sticky pads/double sided tape can be bought in stores. Kitty castles also provide scratching posts and places for your cat to climb, sleep, and hide.
- Cat's nails can be trimmed by you or your veterinarian to keep them short and less sharp.
- Soft paws are acrylic nails that can be applied over your cat's nails to make them blunt so they are able to scratch but do not ruin furniture. These are available at most pet stores as well as at many veterinarian's offices. For a small fee, many vets will provide a first time application and show you how to replace them yourself as they fall off.

Toys:

- Kittens and young adults love toys. Little mice, balls, bells, cat dancers and feathered toys are all appropriate. Make sure toys are supervised if they have small parts or anything that can be ingested.
- Adult cats may prefer toys that allow interaction with you. Cat dancers, balls on strings, laser lights, and other toys are very appealing to cats.

Grooming:

- Cats are clean animals and tend to need little grooming. Brushes and combs for cats are available. Long haired cats should be brushed daily for a healthy coat and to help prevent against matted fur. Combs with razor edges are also available and are great for removing matted fur with little pain and discomfort to the cat.
- Waterless shampoo and wipes are also available for “washing” your cat when you feel it may be necessary. For serious matted fur or problem coats, you may need to schedule an appointment with a groomer or your veterinarian.

Vaccines and Routine Care:

- The rabies vaccine is the only vaccine required by law. This needs to be up to date at all times.
- The feline distemper vaccine is a core vaccine that all cats should have. Other vaccines are available and maybe recommended by your veterinarian. Please let him/her know about your cat’s lifestyle so that he/she may be able to help keep your pet healthy. Your cat should go to the vet at least every year for a check-up. This helps maintain your cat’s health and prevent problems that may become serious down the road.

If you have any questions, concerns, or problems feel free to call us! Thank you for supporting the Belmont County Animal Rescue League and good luck with your new feline friend!