

ManyPets®

Guide for new cat parents





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Pet parenting? It's the cat's whiskers

Exciting news, your new cat is coming home! The years ahead together will be picture-perfect. Contented purrs slinking between your ankles at dinnertime, pointed claws kneading a soft blanket at the end of the bed. A house is not a home without a cat. We're so excited for you, and all these memories to come.

Congratulations on bringing home the most fun and potentially stressful addition you'll ever make! Kittens are the sweetest creatures but also inherently a bit trouble seeking. They are affectionate, curious, loving and bold. Having a kitten is an absolute blast, but it's also lots of work. In this guide, we're going to give you an overview of the must-know information for first-time (or even experienced) kitten owners.

Although cats have a reputation for being 'hands-off', they have doting pet parents behind the scenes. Organising their healthcare, microchipping and vaccines, figuring out their favourite and most nutritional foods, soothing their anxieties, and helping them get to know their territory are all important to forming happy and healthy cats.

**"Once you read through this guide,
we hope you feel like a pro!"**

Dr. Kirsten Ronngren DVM MRCVS



If you're still researching which cat to bring home and you're adopting, get complete confidence and find a reputable UK rehoming organisation that's a member of the [Association of Dogs and Cats Homes](#). [↗](#)

Alternatively, make sure you buy your pet from a reputable breeder. Use the [Governing Council of the Cat Fancy \(GCCF\)](#)'s [↗](#) interactive map to find one near you.



Before you visit your cat



Your first pet parent duty, whether you're buying or adopting, is to get to know the person currently caring for your cat. They might be a breeder, a charity, a fosterer, or even a friend or a family member.

They alone hold the keys to your potential cat-to-be. They'll have first-hand experience of the cat's personality, habits and health, and perhaps even observations of your cat's parents, or the wider family tree, so their advice can set you on the right path before your cat even comes home. In that conversation, ask these key questions:

1. When is the cat's birthday?

Let's start with the basics. Your cat's date of birth will tell you about its age-appropriate health needs.

A kitten, for example, must stay with its mum until it's 8 weeks old. At that age, they are well socialised with their siblings and mum, equipped with core skills, and they might be fully weaned. But they may or may not have had their first set of vaccines done and microchipped placed, so be sure to ask if this was done.

2. Please can I see the cat?

Seeing the cat in person will help you to identify health concerns. At any age, a cat or kitten should be well groomed, with a soft, silky coat, and have clear, wide eyes free from discharge.

Poor health isn't always visible, especially in kittens. If you can't see a kitten with its mother and it's younger than 8 weeks, there is a chance it has been farmed or

imported. You must ask why you can't see the mum and whether the kitten was reared with her.

3. Where was the cat raised?

Poor, isolated conditions in a cat's early years increase its risk of disease, poor health and behaviour problems.

If a kitten is separated from its mum and raised outdoors, in a breeding shed, for example, it can be an unsafe start to life. It can have difficulty transitioning comfortably from that environment to your home, and most importantly, it it might lack the immunity gained from maternal antibodies and colostrum, which is in a kitten's first milk.

4. If they're a breeder, check if they have a licence

To sell cats as pets, a breeder must have a licence, which can only be granted following an inspection of the premises by the local council. That inspection will guarantee the breeder has bred the kittens themselves, that they have been reared in suitable accommodation, and that they are protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

If you're concerned about the welfare of the kitten or cat you visit, contact the [Local Authority Trading Standards](#). [↗](#)

5. Do you have concerns about this cat's health?

If the cat is being cared for by a trustworthy and experienced owner, they will spot health problems and sort them out as they arise. They can evidence vet checks – or at least talk about them – and present a record of vaccinations.

A less desirable situation is that the owner hasn't invested in health or had healthcare checks. But you can get a lot from the owner's observations, so ask what their sensitivities are. Watery eyes, upset tummies, cracked teeth, weak joints – all paints a picture of their health you can follow up, in lieu of official medical notes.

6. Were its parents healthy?

A registered breeder knows a kitten's family tree and the health records of all the cats on it inside-out.

It won't be as easy to get a clean bill of generational health if you're adopting or fostering, but you'll have assurances that the organisation caring for your cat will have done everything in its power to assure your cat's wellbeing and health.

7. What documentation can you give me?

When you adopt a cat through the official channels, you'll likely receive the cat's vaccination, neutering and microchip information, plus any other details the organisation has about the cat.

If you're adopting within your family or community, ask what documentation they have. If there is no documentation, start from scratch and book your new friend into the vet for a check-up and get advice about vaccinations, plus scan for a microchip.

If you're rescuing a cat from overseas, it must have a pet passport or a veterinary certificate.

If you're purchasing a cat from a breeder, you may even get a certificate revealing your cat's family tree, complete with all their pedigree names – that's a fun one!

And you might be asked to sign a contract, often called 'the kitten contract', which lays out standards of care, and what happens if your kitten becomes unwell.





Vaccinations are an essential part of kitten ownership. As kittens age, we need to teach their immune system how to respond to nasty invaders they may face in the future, particularly those we know have serious consequences.

Core vaccines recommended for ALL cats include:

1. Upper respiratory complex vaccine:

This vaccine includes three common respiratory viruses in cats (see below). The first dose is given between 6-8 weeks of age, then boosted 4 weeks later. The next dose will be due in one year, then a variation is usually given every 1-3 years depending on the cat's risk level. This schedule may vary based on vaccine brand. The vaccine includes:

a. Feline calicivirus – This virus causes infections in cats resulting in sneezing, nasal and ocular discharge, oral ulcers, or conjunctivitis. In severe cases, cats can

become painful and febrile. Transmission can be directly from cat to cat, but also by contaminated environments.

b. Feline herpes virus type 1 – FHV-1 can cause symptoms such as sneezing, congestion and ocular/nasal discharge. These symptoms will vary between cats in type and severity. Once a cat is infected with FHV-1, it will remain infected for life. Symptoms then have the potential to flare up again in times of stress or other diseases occurring, whereas some cats will remain positive and never show symptoms again.

c. Feline panleukopenia virus – You may have also heard this called feline distemper or feline parvo, in comparison to its canine counterpart. Feline panleukopenia is its own virus that attacks rapidly dividing cells in the body. It can cause respiratory symptoms, but can also impact the gut and bone marrow. Owners may note sneezing, lethargy, decreased appetite, vomiting or diarrhoea, or even fever. The virus is rapidly spread directly from cat to cat, or by contamination in the environment.

2. Feline leukemia virus (FeLV):

This virus affects the immune system in cats, and is usually transmitted directly through infected bodily fluids like saliva, urine, faeces and even milk from mother to baby. FeLV is commonly passed cat to cat from biting/fighting. Symptoms are often vague, including decreased appetite, fever, weight loss, oral inflammation and secondary bacterial infections such as to the upper respiratory tract.

The first dose is given around 8 weeks of age, then boosted 4 weeks later. The next dose will be due in one year, then is usually given every 3 years depending on the cat's risk assessment by your vet. It is usually given in combination with the upper respiratory virus vaccine.

Non-core vaccinations are recommended based on individual pet lifestyle and risk factors, and include:

Rabies virus – Luckily we don't have rabies in the UK at the moment, but if your cat is coming from outside the UK or will be travelling internationally, they will need a rabies vaccination. Rabies virus is fatal and has no cure, so the best thing we can do to help protect our at-risk pets is vaccinate! This vaccine is usually given for the first time after 12 weeks of age. The next dose will be due in one year, then every 1-3 years after that depending on product/timing.

There are a few other vaccines out there that can be given for diseases like FIV (feline immunodeficiency virus), Chlamydia felis (bacterial), Bordetella and FIP (feline infectious peritonitis) – though these are used much less commonly and based on factors such as risk level, product effectiveness and disease prevalence in your area.



“Preventative care is one of the best steps we can take to be proactive about our pet's health. Both vaccinations and regular parasite prevention can help avoid diseases with serious consequences. And it costs less too, decreasing potential pain and stress for both you and your pet!”

Dr. Kirsten Ronngren DVM MRCVS



Microchipping



Cats can be microchipped by a vet, or another cat care organisation, at any point in their lives. It's a typical procedure when they're little, however. It's easy to do while they're already at the vet, or with an animal welfare organisation, being neutered, for example.

According to research from Cats Protection, it costs between £20-£30. In some places it may be a little as £15, or may be included in a healthy pet package with your vet.

A quick injection places a chip (the size of a grain of rice) under their skin. It assigns them a unique code, matching them up to a database with your contact details. The microchip is identified when scanned. If they get lost, or if they're stolen, the microchip means you're more likely to be reunited when they're found.

If you plan on travelling internationally with your cat, they will definitely need to be microchipped with an ISO-compliant 15-digit chip. This is how the animal is legally identified and linked to its health and vaccination records.



“It's an assurance that lasts a lifetime because unlike a collar, it can't be removed easily. It also can't injure them and won't hurt once under the skin.”

Dr. Kirsten Ronngren DVM MRCVS

Preventing fleas, ticks and worms



Cats in the UK need to have consistent flea, tick and worming treatment every month. The dosage and frequency will depend on your cat's weight, lifestyle, risk levels and location among other factors.

Setting up a solid parasite prevention plan for your kitten early is key to successful pet parenthood going forward. When we say parasites, we mean both external bugs like fleas and ticks, as well as internal bugs such as worms. Not only are these parasites gross, but they can make your kitten and possibly your family sick. Flea treatment is important even for indoor-only kittens and kittens that only have supervised time in the garden.

Kittens are extremely susceptible to parasites, especially worms. They can be infected directly in the uterus from their mother, but also spend lots of time close to the ground and may accidentally consume other animals' faeces (gross, but true) then become infected.

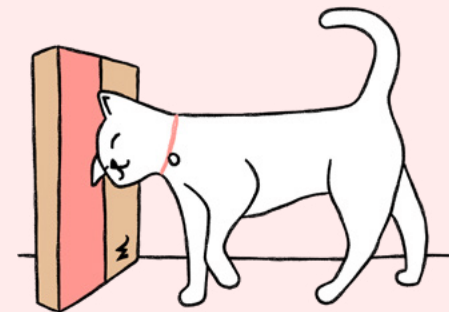
Most parasite preventative products are safe for use over 8 weeks of age, but be sure to check with your vet about what's best for your kitten. There are lots of options on the market, and it's easy to get overwhelmed. Products can come in a spot-on "topical" liquid that goes on the skin at the back of the neck, or as an oral tablet. Most flea and tick preventatives need to be given once per month to be effective. Wormer may be given every 1 to 3 months depending on age, lifestyle, diet, and other risk factors. A nice thing is, these days, products are becoming available with broader coverage in one product, meaning you have to give your kitten less medications to keep them protected against more things!



The ManyPets Flea, tick and worm plan

The ManyPets Flea, tick and worm plan is safe and proven non-prescription parasite treatment from £7.49 per month.

It's tailored to your cat and delivered to your door every month. ManyPets customers get an exclusive discount in My Account.





Neutering



Neutering your kitten is a decision that should be based on your kitten's individual health specific breed, temperament, and plans for their life. This is definitely a conversation we encourage you having with your veterinarian, as they can help assess these factors.

Generally speaking, the veterinary profession tends to favour neutering pets as a rule of thumb, unless you plan to use your pet for breeding or showing purposes. There's a few reasons for this!

For male cats, we can see increased behavioural issues such as urine marking, resource guarding such as food or territory, or even aggression if they are left intact. Often, intact tom cats are the culprits in fighting/cat bite abscess cases.

For females, there are a few more time-sensitive and life-threatening issues associated with remaining intact.

Female cats that are not spayed are not only at risk of producing more kittens in a very rapid fashion, but also have an

increased risk of developing aggressive mammary cancer later in life. These cats may also develop a condition called pyometra, which is a potentially fatal bacterial infection within the uterus and requires immediate surgery to remove the uterus. As mentioned, cats procreate quickly! Female cats cycle many times per year and can produce several kittens per litter. This means that having your female cats spayed helps control the population number.

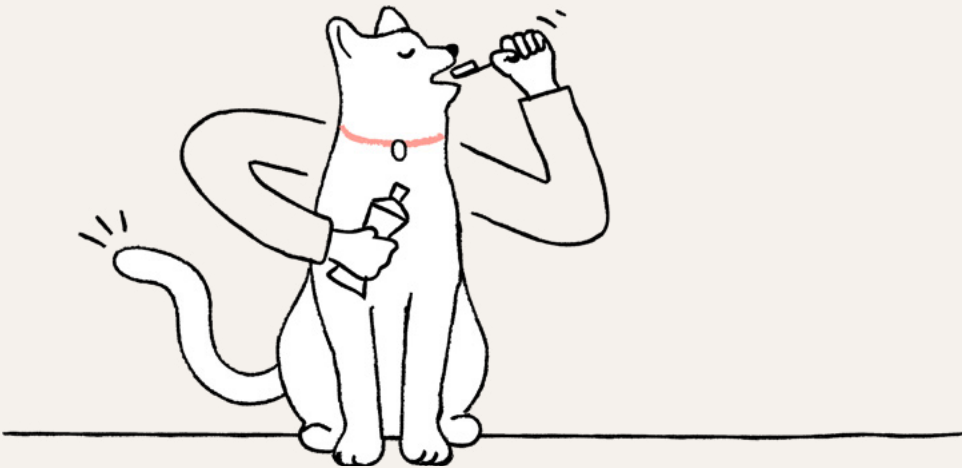
So when should you have your kitten neutered? The answer is, IT DEPENDS! Timing of neutering depends on the factors we mentioned above, like breed and lifestyle. Generally speaking, many vets say anytime after around 5-6 months of age and over about 2.5kg in weight are good numbers to have in mind. This will allow female kittens to grow but be spayed prior to their first heat cycle (and yes, kittens CAN get pregnant during their first season). This is a conversation worth having with your vet to decide what's best for your kitten!



“It’s a common misconception that general anaesthesia isn’t safe, but complications in young healthy cats are extremely rare with appropriate drug protocols and monitoring. Most kitties do extremely well during and after neutering!”

Dr. Kirsten Ronngren DVM MRCVS

Common health problems in cats



1. VOMITING: Often times single episodes of vomiting are one-offs. Your kitty has eaten too much, they've caught a virus, or maybe it's the wrong diet. It's not normal, however, for cats to be sick regularly. Many common cat diseases present with vomiting as the primary complaint. Regular sickness can be a symptom of hyperthyroidism, kidney disease and inflammatory bowel disease. If your cat is regularly vomiting, take them to the vet to investigate. In 2022, ManyPets paid 429 claims for vomiting cats.

2. DIARRHOEA: Healthy cat poo is dark brown and firm. If their poo changes consistency for longer than 24 hours, and their behaviour changes (for example, their poo is smelly and they're generally gassier, they're bloated, lethargic and unkempt), it's highly likely they're poorly. Contact your vet to discuss the symptoms. Diarrhoea can be a symptom of diseases such as parasites (giardia, cryptosporidium, tritrichomonas, or worms), intestinal inflammation or pancreatitis, eating something they shouldn't, or even feeding the wrong diet. We can also see diarrhoea with a host of more serious conditions, such as cancer or toxins. In 2022, ManyPets paid 309 diarrhoea claims for cats.

3. DENTAL DISEASE: At your annual check-up, your vet will check your cat's teeth and gum health. Dental disease is common in older cats and it's very painful.

If you notice they're off their food, have bad breath, drooling or have red gums, or a swollen face, that may indicate they have tooth pain. In 2022, ManyPets paid 251 dental claims for cats.

Brushing your cat's teeth can form part of their daily routine with you. It's not as hard as you may think and can increase the bond between you. Remember to start slowly and build up to a more prolonged brush. Gentle finger brushes can be a great start.

If using a regular toothbrush, be sure to use a soft bristled toothbrush and pet-safe toothpaste!

4. OBESITY: A majority of our pet cats are at least somewhat over their ideal body weight. Just like humans, a cat's health is negatively impacted by being overweight. Pets that are overweight are at increased risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and most commonly arthritis. Keeping cats active and eating the right amount of the right diet can help maintain a healthy weight.

5. URINARY TRACT DISEASE: Cats are experts at developing disease along the urinary tract. Younger cats commonly develop inflammation of the bladder wall, referred to as cystitis. This can be exacerbated by stress and being overweight, as well as other factors. Older kitties will commonly face some degree of kidney degeneration. Being aware can help cat owners be proactive and recognise signs early.

Feeding your cat



1. One of the most important things when choosing a kitten food is just that – choosing a diet that is made for KITTENS. Kittens have a very specific nutrient requirement needed for growth, so it's important to pick a food that says it is formulated for "kittens or all life stages". As they approach adulthood (closer to 10-12 months) you can slowly change them to an adult formulation.

2. While we're talking about nutrient requirements, let's touch on home-cooked pet diets and raw diets. While these have gained a lot of traction over the years, they aren't typically recommended for kittens. Kittens have a very specific nutrient requirement as they grow, and are also more susceptible to infections and parasites – so sticking with a specifically formulated diet is typically the safest and most reliable way to avoid those risks.

3. Feed multiple smaller meals per day. Kittens need a more constant stream of calories as they grow, so feeding their daily calories split into 3-4 meals over

the course of the day is a helpful way to do that. Plus cats, generally speaking, are naturally more consistent grazers vs. eating fewer large meals.

4. If you're going to change their diet, do it SLOWLY! Abruptly changing a diet has the potential to cause gut upset, so slowly transitioning over a period of 1-2 weeks makes it less likely for them to vomit or get diarrhoea.

5. It's OK to use both wet and dry food. It's common for kitten owners to think that wet food is bad for kittens, but it's actually perfectly safe for them to eat a combination of wet and dry food as long as both are labelled for kittens! Just remember Tip 4 above when you're adding or changing foods, do it slowly!

Many vets encourage cat parents to feed a portion of the diet as a wet formulation because cats are typically not great water drinkers, so this helps with how much moisture they are getting daily and can make giving medications easier down the road.



“If you're not sure what is best to feed your kitten, chat with your vet! They can help give recommendations based on your cat's lifestyle, likes/dislikes, age and any concurrent health conditions! They can also help you sort through overwhelming and confusing pet food labels”.

Dr. Kirsten Ronngren DVM MRCVS

Preparing your cat's



Whether you live in a house or a flat, make your home comfortable, safe, secure and fun for your cat.

- Pick a shaded cat carrier to keep your pet calm and comfortable on the journey home. Keep the carrier out in the first few weeks for your cat to hide away in, if they get nervous.
- Have a selection of calming sprays and plug-ins ready in case they're anxious.
- Invest in a generously sized litter tray and use the same litter that your cat has always had. The familiar smell will let them know where to go to the loo, but you might have to direct them in the right direction in the first few days. Clean it regularly.
- Pick up several food and water bowls so you can rotate them throughout the week.
- Stock a selection of food while you figure out your cat's likes and dislikes. You can always give away unused items on the community-sharing app, Olio.
- Build cosy snooze dens for your cat. We recommend three – an enclosed space, a high space and a spacious bed for them to sprawl in and relax, undisturbed.

- If you have a long-haired cat, pick up an appropriate comb and brush. Some cats love being groomed by their owner and others don't, but they will need help if their fur becomes matted.
- Set up scratching posts around your home they can scratch and stretch on.
- Keep a basket of toys and treats to stimulate them.
- If your cat begs for your attention – face bumps, chatty meows, pawing your arm – pay them attention. You're the centre of their universe and they're telling you they need you.
- Many cats love access to fresh water so perhaps invest in a fresh water fountain to maintain a healthy water intake.
- Do remember not to place your cat's resources such as food and litter trays too close to one another – our cats are very resource particular and do not appreciate this layout.
- If you have more than one cat then you must increase on all resource management. Having a separate resource space for each cat (i.e. food, water and litter tray) is important to decrease stress and inter-cat aggression.



INDOOR CATS: International Cat Care estimates that 10% of cats are kept indoors. Indoor cats might be housebound for health reasons – they have a disability or another medical concern – or they live next to a dangerous road, or 15 floors up in a high-rise flat.

A CAT IN A FLAT: A cat won't abandon its basic instincts because it's inside. If you live in a flat, expect hunting, scratching, climbing and pouncing, just as they would outdoors. You can channel all of those impulses into scratching posts, toys and games.

There are swathes of manufactured toys, designed to keep them physically fit and mentally sharp. But you might find that your cat is more inclined to leap into the empty box the toy arrived in, than play with the toy itself. If that's the case, it'll save you a small fortune.

DIY kitty puzzles are easy to make at home, making use of and repurposing the items you already have. Cardboard boxes, crumpled newspaper, egg boxes, loo roll tubes, teaser wands and feathers, will keep them stimulated.

A tall, multi-level cat tree boasts tough scratching posts even larger breeds of cat can stretch against, cut their claws on and essentially, scratch to pieces. They can sleep on the levels and hide in the cubed dens. If your cat likes peace and quiet, you could stash the tree behind a cosy door, but if they like watching birds, place it next to a window.

CATIOS AND GARDEN ENCLOSURES:

If your pet is determined to go out, but it's not safe for them to do so, create an enclosure in the outdoor space.

'Catios' come in a variety of sizes, but all are designed to give your cat an outdoor experience. Made of steel, plastic, wire and wood, they are multi-level and intended to hang outside of windows, stand around your door, or enclose an open balcony.

INDOOR/OUTDOOR CATS: If you do want to let your kitty outdoors sometimes, wait until they are closer to fully grown. It's also important to make sure your contact information is up to date on their microchip. Introduce them to the outdoors slowly over time, and consider starting out with a harness or leash in the back garden. You can introduce them to new places such as close-by streets so that when you do let them out unsupervised, they are more familiar with the area.



Pet insurance for your cat



Take care of your cat by setting them up with pet insurance when you bring them home.



From broken teeth to eating something they shouldn't, your cat can go from healthy to in need of a vet in the blink of an eye.

If you've got pet insurance in place already, you'll have the peace of mind that you'll have help paying for an unexpected vet trip when you really need it.

But if you hesitate before taking out cover and your cat gets sick in the meantime, that could mean that their illness or injury becomes classed as a 'pre-existing condition', meaning it probably won't be covered by any pet insurance you take out afterwards.

Not all pet insurance is created equal. Some policies put limits on how long you can claim for a particular condition or how much you can claim for it. This makes

them less suitable for covering your cat for their entire life, as you could end up running out of cover.

All ManyPets policies offer lifetime pet insurance – that means they have an annual vet fee limit that refreshes each year when you renew the policy. Our Complete policy has up to £15,000 a year in vet fee cover and includes dental illness.

Our policies also include unlimited free video vet calls so you can speak to a qualified vet about any worries you have 24/7. Our policies cover behavioural treatment and complementary therapies so you can be confident that help is at hand for anything that cat life throws at you.

Find out how much your cover will cost at [Manypets.com/uk](https://www.manypets.com/uk) [↗](#)

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