

Kitten Care

It is an exciting time adopting a new kitten so every effort should be made to ensure the kitten settles in nicely. Make sure you have a secure, lined (in case of little accidents!) carrier to take your new kitten home in. Your new kitten will need sturdy food and water bowls and a litter tray. You will need to keep your kitten indoors until it is fully vaccinated.

At first your kitten will need a secure and warm bed to sleep in. This can be as simple as a cut down cardboard box with a blanket. As we all know your cat will choose its own sleeping spots around your house as it gets more settled and secure in its new environment but, until then, it helps if your kitten has a safe place to call its own.

It is often best to create a pen for your new kitten, or designate a room to house its bowls, litter tray and bed. This way you can be sure that your inquisitive new kitten won't get into too much trouble while you are not around to supervise. It also makes introductions to other cats and dogs easier. Established pets will know they can escape from the new addition to the family and the kitten can equally be protected from unsympathetic older pets! Your new kitten may like to explore the whole house but it is better to let it get used to one room first.

If you want your cat to wear a collar it pays to adapt them from kittenhood. Modern cat collars have safety catches which release should the cat happen to be caught in a fence by its collar or get its foot stuck. It pays to attach your contact details to the collar should your cat ever get lost. Alternatively you may like to have your cat microchipped. This is a permanent electronic method of identification and involves inserting a tiny device about the size of a grain of rice under the cat's skin.

Do not panic if your new kitten disappears under the bed for a short time. Often this is the first time a kitten will have been away from its mother and the new surroundings can be daunting. Try to coax your new kitten back with food and attention. Try to keep children (who are often very excited and noisy at the prospect of a new kitten!) calm by explaining how frightening it must be for the new kitten in its new home. Explain how important it is to be gentle as they all clamour to get their hands on it at once!



Feeding your new kitten

Cats, unlike dogs need to be fed little and often to get enough energy to grow. Kittens will gain around 10g of bodyweight every day from birth to six-seven month of age. It is difficult to get the right balance of vitamins and minerals necessary for your new kitten in a home made diet. Cats are natural carnivores and cannot survive on a vegetarian diet. Equally they cannot survive on dog food for long, since they require specific forms of nutrients including Niacin and Taurine.

Choose a brand formulated for kittens and growing cats to feed for the first year of life. A good quality food that your kitten enjoys eating and looks well on is preferred. An eight to 12 week old kitten will need about five meals a day. It is often most practical to provide a dry food which does not go off so quickly if you are leaving food out all day. You can continue to feed a dry food on an ad lib basis right through the cat's life, since cats are natural 'grazers' and will decide how often they eat.

Cats and kittens do not need cows milk as part of their diet. In fact the bovine proteins and lactose can cause stomach upsets. If you really want to feed your kitten milk you can buy specially formulated cat milk. Milk is certainly no substitute for clean fresh water which should be on offer all the time.



PARVOVIRUS

When your vet recommends you get your new puppy vaccinated there are many diseases from which your dog will be protected. One of these is Parvovirus.

Parvovirus is a particularly nasty virus which is extremely hardy. It can last for years in the environment and is not readily killed by conventional disinfectants. It is for this reason that infected dogs are kept in strict isolation.

Parvovirus is highly contagious from the environment and from other dogs. It is not advisable to socialise your puppy with other dogs until it has received both its initial vaccination and its booster shot four weeks later.

Infected dogs will have profuse, often bloody diarrhoea and will vomit. Ask any vet or vet nurse about Parvovirus and they will tell you that it has a very distinct unpleasant smell, and that dogs will often die from this disease. In fact the mortality

rate is as high as 48%, which gives your dog roughly a one in two chance of recovering from Parvovirus. These are grave odds.

In addition to the shocking and painful signs of disease, treatment is very expensive. Frequently dogs will need to be on a drip for days to replenish lost fluids. Treatment costs can be high and we have had the experience of owners having to make the very difficult decision of having to choose euthanasia over the expense of treatment.

Parvovirus, is shed in recovered animals for up to three weeks. This means that even if your dog is successfully treated for Parvovirus it will still pose a threat to other unvaccinated dogs for up to three weeks post recovery.

It is part and parcel of responsible dog ownership that you get your pups vaccinated and do your part to help slow the spread of this devastating disease.

KEEPING RATS AND MICE AS PETS

Many people balk at the idea of keeping rats and mice as pets. Lots of people have an irrational fear of these tiny creatures. My suggestion is that unless you are an elephant these animals make wonderful pets!

Rodents are kept as children's pets and for show. Rats in particular make excellent pets as they soon become accustomed to being handled and are easy to train.

Rodents can chew through plastic and wood, therefore metal or glass enclosures are preferred. There are pros and cons of caged housing and aquaria housing. Caged housing provides bars for the animals to climb on and allows the animals to smell as well as see their owners. It can however be quite draughty. Aquaria housing provides a cosy and draught free environment but needs to be cleaned more frequently than cages because of the potential build up of condensation and ammonia from urine.

Small rodents seem to like hiding in corners so cages should be square or rectangular. If a circular or oval cage is used, a nesting or hiding area should be provided. If at all possible cages should have front or side access to avoid frightening the pet (in the wild predators come from above).

Exercise wheels and ladders provide entertainment and environmental enrichment, but beware of them taking up too much floor space. Cages for rodents are often too small. A cage size of 30cm by 30cm by 45cm is big enough for ONE rat (or two mice).

Rodents indulge in the habit of eating their own faeces directly from their rectums! This is known as coprophagia and serves to provide the animal with Vitamins B and K which they would otherwise lack. It is completely normal behaviour and is nothing to be worried about.

There are many types of bedding on the market for small rodents. Avoid cotton wool as it tends to become tangled on legs and tails. Soft wood (pine) shavings or chips are best since the oils in hard wood products can cause skin irritation. Do not use newspaper as the ink may be poisonous. You should clean out the cage two or three times a week to prevent disease and minimise odours.

A commercially produced, complete, pelleted diet is perfect for rats and mice. Occasional supplementation with apples and tomatoes is a good idea. You can also offer a hard dog biscuit or a piece of deciduous wood to encourage gnawing and prevent over growth of teeth. Mice may like a salt or mineral lick and rats adore sweet foods like chocolate or cake (in moderation of course!). Sometimes it's possible to make use of their sweet tooth for administering medication or as a training aid. Clean fresh water should be available at all times. If you use a water bottle with a drinking spout be sure that it is cleaned regularly and checked for blockages.

As with all pets, overfeeding and lack of exercise can lead to obesity. Rats should be allowed out of the cage for at least ten minutes a day to exercise.



Puppy Pre-school

Congratulations to the above group for completing the AHC Puppy Pre-School.

Our next course runs from October the 15th 2008 with Hamilton Trainer Fred Ferla.

- Learn how to socialise and have fun with your puppy
- Teach obedience and prevent behavioural problems
- Four sessions for puppies between 7 - 15 weeks of age

reserve your spot NOW!

& the winner is...

Congratulations to Chrisanne Thomson and Black Cat the lucky winners of our \$200 Dental Month Voucher.



THE NEW ZEALAND COMPANION ANIMAL REGISTER IS NOW 1 YEAR OLD!

1st September 2008 was the 1st anniversary of the launch of the leading New Zealand based online microchip animal repatriation database. It has been a very successful first year for the NZCAR with over half of all NZ vets registered to use this system, along with 10 SPCAs and 10 territorial authorities. Even though dogs are the largest category of animal registered, cats are not far behind. Other species registered include horses, ferrets, rabbits, fish, birds and one tortoise.

What is microchipping, and what are the benefits?

Microchips are a small device about the size of a grain of rice. The microchip is implanted in the soft scruff of the neck. The microchip has a unique number that can be read by a special reader, similar to a barcode reader. This number is stored in the register with your contact details. The NZCAR is an online register and allows vets and SPCAs to search and recover owner details at any time to quickly reunite owners and their pets.

Repatriation Success Stories

A Vet clinic had a kitten brought to them which was on the database. NZCAR followed up with the owner, and it turns out the kitten had been missing for a while. Both kitten and owner were relieved to be back with each other.

A good samaritan in Auckland found a cat. First this kind lady took it to a vet to be scanned, after getting the chip number she rang NZCAR and then after they spoke with the owner she also delivered the cat home. If only everyone was so dedicated and helpful.

A kitten was found trying to board the Devonport Ferry without a ticket! It was in the NZCAR database and was returned before the owner was aware it was missing.

Visit www.animalregister.co.nz for more information on microchipping your pet or talk to one of our small animal staff members.



DOOLITTLE'S DIARY

SPRING 2008

ACCIDENTAL POISONING

1080

In recent weeks our small animal clinics have been presented with several dogs suffering from 1080 poisoning. 1080 is a chemical substance used to control possum populations particularly in TB affected areas. Possums are thought to play a role in the transfer of TB to livestock and so control measures are employed.

Unfortunately, dogs are 10 times more susceptible to 1080 poisoning than possums. Dogs may be poisoned by eating the bait, or more commonly by eating poisoned possum carcasses, particularly the stomach and intestines.

Signs of sickness occur about two to eight hours after ingestion of the poison. Usually dogs will begin to drool profusely and to vomit. Vomit from a poisoned dog may be lethal if eaten by another dog and should therefore be destroyed. It is very important to get your dog to the vet immediately after eating 1080 bait to limit absorption of the poison from the stomach. Often washing soda crystals are used to make the dog vomit and intravenous fluids are administered.

Poisoned dogs may also start to seizure. Again it is important to get your dog to the vet promptly for medication to control the seizures. Recovered dogs should not be given any food or water for 24 hours following 1080 poisoning as this may lead to further vomiting and seizing. 1080 poisoning is life threatening.

Cats are less susceptible to 1080 poisoning than dogs, but are also harder to treat.



Snail and Slug Bait

Common household snail and slug bait is deadly if swallowed by your dog or cat. Signs of poisoning include nervous tremors, convulsions and muscle weakness. As with 1080 poisoning, seek veterinary attention for your pet immediately. Usually vomiting is induced to limit absorption of the bait from the gut. Often sedation is necessary to control the seizures. Affected animals usually recover providing they are treated promptly and signs of poisoning have not been prolonged.

Rumensin

Many of you will remember Scruff from a previous newsletter. Scruff had a lucky escape from the devastating effects of Rumensin toxicity. Most dogs with Rumensin poisoning are not so fortunate and many of them die before they get to the clinic. Rumensin is a ruminant feed additive used to promote growth and control bloat in cattle. When dogs scavenge around the farm, they may get into calf feed that contains Rumensin and the results are shocking. Dogs may seizure, vomit and ultimately develop fatal kidney and heart disease. Make a special effort to keep any products containing Rumensin securely locked away so your dogs can resist the temptation!

Rat Bait

Thankfully there is an antidote to this type of poisoning. Vitamin K reduces the effects of rat bait poisoning when given in conjunction with other therapies. Rat Bait causes 'thinning' of the blood and poisoned dogs and cats cannot clot their blood. Left untreated poisoned animals will surely die so, as outlined with the other poisons, seek veterinary help as soon as possible.

Time is of the essence in all cases of accidental poisoning. Call your vet immediately.

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