Mount Vernon Animal Hospital

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**Helpful Tips For a New Kitten**

 **Introducing your kitten to their new home**

A new place for a small kitten can be a little scary. We recommend starting them off in a small room to get used to being in a new environment. Make sure they have access to a litter box and water source at all times. Slowly let your kitten spend more time out of the small room, but continue to supervise your kitten until they are able to easily move around the environment with confidence and are using the litter box regularly.

 **Introducing your new kitten to your established pets**

If you have another cat(s) already in the household, we strongly suggest keeping them separated at first. Older cats can be very territorial towards a new cat in the household. Give the cats a few days to get used to each other’s scent under the door before introducing them in a supervised area of the home (best to be in a neutral area that one hasn’t “claimed”). Start gradually letting the newest addition spend more and more supervised time in the house until you are confident that all cats seem comfortable with each other.

If you have a dog(s) already in the household, similar recommendations of keeping them seperate/supervised in the beginning apply. Dogs should be placed on a leash, in a kennel, or have a basket muzzle in place, prior to introductions if they are not used to cats. Cats can activate a ‘prey drive’ in some dogs so being prepared for that just in case is safest. Additionally, we recommend making sure your cats have adequate vertical space to use when crossing rooms that the dog is in. These can be things like furniture, cleared off tables, cat trees, or wall mounted shelves/walkways. Another option is to use a baby gate, door buddy, cutouts, etc. to allow your new cat a place to get away that the dog can’t follow.

 **Litter Boxes! How many do you need and how to get a kitten to use it**

Cats generally tend to be animals of habit and like to eliminate themselves in a designated place. Teaching a new kitten where to go is usually fairly simple. If the kitten urinates somewhere they shouldn't, clean up the area ASAP using an enzyme based cleaner. If the kitten defecates somewhere outside of the box, pick it up and place it in the box. This lets the kitten know by smell where the appropriate place to go is. With repetition, your kitten should learn this fairly quickly. Don’t ‘punish’ your kitten for going outside of the box unless you catch them in the act. If you do catch them, make a sharp noise at them as a way of correcting them.

Number of litter boxes can vary for your household, but the general rule of thumb is to have one more litter box than you do cats (ex; 3 cats should have 4 boxes). We recommend having the boxes in more than one place so as to give your cat the best chance of success and limit another cat/animal causing territorial issues around the litter box. Additional things to consider are how tall/big the box is and what type of litter you are using, as this can change willingness to use the boxes. Boxes should be scooped frequently (1-2 times a day is usually best) to be kept clean, as cats will prefer to go in a clean box vs a dirty one.

 **Food and why free feeding is not recommend**

Although it is easiest to free feed (leaving food out all the time) our cats, it is not the best for them. Most animals do not self limit when they have open access to food and will eat much more than they need to. This leads to obesity which can cause issues such as; shorter life span, diabetes, liver disease, and joint problems.

Dry food for cats is also high in carbohydrates which are not needed in a cat's diet. Cats are true carnivores which means they need a high meat protein diet. Cats are also a desert animal, which means they get most of their fluid intake from what they eat (though should still have free access to water). With this in mind, a wet food diet is closest to what's appropriate for the species. Amounts vary cat to cat but a loose recommendation is 1-2 of the 3oz cans twice a day or ½-1 whole of the 5.5oz cans twice a day.

Always check the ingredient list of the foods you are buying, looking for a protein to be the first ingredient. We recommend avoiding foods with peas/chickpeas/lentils/soy, as these are poor quality proteins for cats.

If dry food is what works best for your household, meal feed your cats small portions at a time (⅛-⅓ cup of dry food twice a day) so as to limit overeating.

Make sure to feed a variety of proteins/types/brands. Feeding just one food can make a cat more finicky and less likely to try new things. This makes it harder to change them to a different diet if you ever have to change their diet for medical or sourcing issues.

 **Scratching posts and why declawing is not accepted anymore**

It used to be common for people to get their cat declawed, but not anymore. Declawing consists of removing the *entire* first joint of the toe, not just the nail. This is very painful and can lead to arthritis and other painful joint health issues. Taking away a cat's first use weapon can lead them to be more willing to bite as well. You may also see some litter box avoidance due to the discomfort of digging in the litter without claws.

Scratching posts can be very useful in helping keep cats from scratching furniture. If there is a specific spot your cat(s) keep scratching, place a scratching post or board right next to it. Having multiple scratching posts, climbing posts, and other appropriate scratching toys throughout the house can be quite enriching for your cats as well as giving them an appropriate outlet for their scratching. Other ways to help protect your furniture is to use double sided furniture tape or no-scratch sprays. Another alternative is to use soft caps. Soft caps are soft plastic caps that go over animal nails to help keep them from causing damage with their nails. They are usually applied every 2-4 weeks, which is about how often you should be trimming their nails. Even without using soft caps, regular nail trimming can still help reduce damage caused by clawing.