

Everything you  
wanted to  
know about



SEX  
YOUR CAT

but  
were afraid  
to ask

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# kitten tip

**Y**our kitten, as a new addition to your family, is going to give you enormous amounts of pleasure – and no small amount of hard work. Particularly if you have opted for a pair!! Many hours of entertainment are contained in kitten-watching, and we have collected some tips here to help you get the best start with your new companion.



## veterinary advice

Your Cat Clinic staff will have discussed most of these points with you, but feel free to enquire again if you feel you may have missed something – there are many distractions at the Cat Clinic!!

There are now more vaccinations available for your cat – the more we know about cats, the more we can protect them! The traditional vaccines for flu and enteritis are just as important now as ever they were, especially as these diseases can be transmitted via objects (e.g. a fluey cat sneezes on a bush, your pet rubs there a few hours later, and picks up the flu! and feline enteritis travels in the dust on your feet!). However, we can also, these



days, protect them against Feline Leukaemia, the virus that attacks cats' bone marrow and causes fatal cancerous diseases. This virus is only transmitted by close (face to face) contact with an infected cat, but as there are so many more cats around

these days, the chances of your cat coming in contact with the virus is much higher, so we recommend vaccination of all kittens, to prevent their getting the disease, especially if they are to become "out and about" cats. Please see later notes for further clarification of this complex problem (better to vaccinate and stop worrying?!).

Chlamydia is a bacterial conjunctivitis, particularly common among purebred and other 'colony' cats. It causes puffy eyes in young cats, and can lead to a type of hayfever if it sensitises the eyes. There is now a vaccine available to help prevent Chlamydia taking hold, and it can be used in combination with other vaccines.

Vaccination can start as young as 6 - 8 weeks old. A vaccination program involves three injections 2 - 4 weeks apart for flu and enteritis and chlamydia, and two injections for leukaemia. Your kitten should not go out till 10 days after the second injection. Cats of any age can be vaccinated, and there is a often special need to protect your cat if she has to go unexpectedly into a cattery. If her vaccination has only lapsed, then she will be protected much more quickly than starting a whole course. Prevention is much better than suffering the disease.

# feeding

Feeding your kitten should be a breeze. You should introduce her to a variety of foods while she is young and prepared to experiment, but her diet should be based on a good, complete, kitten food, with other samples tried occasionally. The great advantage of the Premium Kitten foods (such as Hills Science, Iams or Whiskas Professional – which is not the supermarket Whiskas) is that it can be left out so the kitten/s can feed as often as they like, and the food won't go off. Kitten food must be balanced for protein, calcium and vitamins for your kitten to thrive and the premium foods are up to 95% digestible, so the kitten gets the full value of what she eats. Supermarket dry foods are cereal and soy protein-based, which is harder for cats to digest, and results in higher magnesium in the urine and more alkaline urine, so predisposing to cystitis (bladder problems).

In addition, the high levels of salt, colourings and preservatives does other rather unhelpful things to intestines in many cats, which then require veterinary intervention.

Do not allow her to tell you what she likes, as cats rapidly become fixated on a particular food, whether or not it is complete or even good for them. Hence the stories of cats



going blind from eating dog food, getting brittle bones from eating only meat, and seizing up with arthritis from eating only liver.

We rarely see these problems now, as most kittens are fed sensibly from the start. Problems with teeth can be reduced by offering uncooked chicken wings or lamb brisket bones, and occasional chunks of meat such as roo or tough beef (up to 10% of the diet can be these sorts of foods).



There is even the specially designed T/D biscuits to make dental health care easier! Tinned food (and meat in fact) is 80% water – look on the can next time and add it up!– so are really most useful for texture and taste, or as a change. Variety is the key.

If your kitten is training you to open the fridge door too often, remember she probably isn't hungry (especially if

there is still dry food in her bowl), she just wants attention, and a game is better than a titbit! Live, active culture yoghurt is always helpful, especially if they have a minor bowel upset (diarrhoea for more than a day, and vomiting more than once). Kitten food is appropriate till 10 months old, and then a slow (5 - 7 days) switch to Adult cat food is recommended, and still Premium if possible.

One of the main worries with kittens is toxoplasmosis, which is a microscopic parasite passed in cat faeces. Routine hygienic handling of the litter tray (Gloves, disinfectant and daily emptying) reduces the risk to negligible levels. The main risks are for pregnant women, particularly those who work in the garden without gloves. Again, please enquire if you feel you are at risk. More people actually come in contact with toxoplasma via uncooked meat or in garden soil than by contact with their cat or kitten. You can reduce your kitten's exposure to Toxoplasma by freezing all meat for a week before feeding it raw, or by cooking thoroughly before presenting it.

The worming programme that we recommend is to begin worming your kitten as soon as you can, and to continue worming every month until 4 months old. The main worms in kittens are hookworms and roundworms, but as they get older, they should be wormed for tapeworms, and lung worms (especially if they are hunting cats). Heartworm (transmitted by mosquito bites) is now of sufficient importance in cats to warrant consideration. In Sydney, 80% of dogs not on effective heartworm prevention have Heartworms in their hearts. This provides a huge reservoir of infection for cats, as a mosquito which bites an infected dog and then bites a cat will transmit the infection. The symptoms and problems in cats arise from the earlier stages of larval migration through the lungs, causing coughing (and perhaps tipping over into asthma). There are no perfect tests for cat heartworm problems, so prevention is the only way to go. Indoor cats are at as much risk as

## Worming

outdoor cats, unless you have very effective mosquito screens. You can give your cat and kitten preventative treatments monthly.

## neutering/desexing

Neutering/Desexing (spaying or castrating) your pet is the only safe and permanent method of preventing unwanted kittens. It involves a day in hospital, then a quiet couple of days afterwards (if you can!). We recommend spaying females at 4 months old, (as well-fed kittens can be pregnant by 6 months old! ). There is no advantage to her having kittens, and in fact it greatly increases her chances of having breast cancer later in life. The main reason, though, is to prevent the regular production of kittens – she will produce up to three litters a year if well-fed and left to her own devices!! There is no difference for males between being castrated at 6 weeks or 6 months. If you want a ‘beefy boy’ you’ll need to wait till 9 – 12 months old, but if they start to spray, get them done next day!! Both males and females can be neutered at as young as 6 weeks, but this is usually only done for population control by charities and some pedigree breeders. The only risk is in having an anaesthetic so young, but the operation is very successful with no long term problems in either sex, and all the kittens who find homes via the Cat Clinic are done at that age. Some have grown into the biggest cats around – but that is due to their Premium start in life (both food and attention!!)



# Leukaemia vaccination

**I**t is only in recent times that we have had any method of preventing this disease. It is a complex virus (as befits the cat – there are still mysteries for the virus to reveal even after 40 years of intensive study!).

The important points are that the virus can attack any cat, but does require close contact to be infective (it does not infect another cat if the virus has been off the cat for more than an hour), and that it is most effective in attacking young cats, by invading their bone marrow.

Once a cat reaches the age of about three years old, she has an internal immunity (rather like with whooping cough in children), and can more easily throw the virus off on her own. However, the story does not stop there! In all cats that get infected, there is a chance that a small amount of virus may hide away somewhere in the body, completely undetectable, only to surface in later life and cause cancer of the intestinal lymph nodes or kidneys. This seems to be scenario for Australian cats (whereas in the UK and USA, the virus mainly destroys the bone marrow in young cats, and only occasionally hides out and causes the cancerous problems in older cats). But now we have a vaccine to protect your cat, so it is an issue worthy of your consideration.

LEUCOGEN is very effective in protecting your cat against any attack of the leukaemia virus. We therefore recommend it for all cats, but especially kittens as they are the most vulnerable. They will then not have any virus hide away, nor have the virus destroy the bone marrow.

Vaccination is also for older cats, especially those of unknown history, or who may have been in contact with the virus, prior to our having any vaccines available (this is



almost any cat). This vaccine protects your pet from being overwhelmed by the virus, should they encounter it post-vaccination. More importantly, it protects against the resurfacing of the virus in later life (via

producing FOCMA, for those who have researched this fascinating topic), and so protects against the cancer which the virus causes after a long time delay.

No test will pick up the virus as it lays dormant, and in fact, even once the virus starts showing as a cancer, the test for FeLV will remain negative in most cases. There is no cure, so prevention is really an insurance especially applicable for cats younger than eight years old who may have been “adventure cats” in their youth. The more we study the Leukaemia virus and the cat, the more we learn, and the story will likely be modified as time goes on. As changes occur, we will modify our programmes to give your pet the best protection possible.

# Feline aids

**T**his is a virus which has stolen the limelight in recent years. Cats have had it as part of their environment for hundreds of years or so, and seem less affected by it than we are on their behalf.

IT HAS ABSOLUTELY NO EFFECT ON HUMANS, EVEN ILL AND IMMUNOSUPPRESSED ONES – it is just something else cats keep to themselves. Sadly, we can neither help nor hinder the progress of the virus in the cat, but it does seem that most cats can contain the virus for some years before it makes them very ill. About 10% of Sydney cats are infected, and the frequency of their fights with other cats is a fair indicator of their likelihood of getting the virus. It is only transmitted by bites (but one tooth covered with virus-infected saliva is enough to infect a new cat, and as in human AIDS, once is forever).

As most Cat fights happen at night this is another good reason for keeping your cat indoors after dark.

# Identification

Mostly, cats know where they are. However, sometimes, their owners are not so sure of their location. If your kitten will tolerate a collar and disc, that is of assistance when your pet makes an unauthorised sortie further from home. However, the microchip is a permanent form of identification. It is a silicon chip put under the skin. All vets and councils and welfare agencies have the scanners to check all stray animals. These pets are then rapidly returned to their owners, as their number is held on file at a central registry and linked to their owner's address. NSW requires all cats to be registered and identified, and while a collar and disc will do, if that is lost and there is no microchip, then your pet will be permanently lost to you.

Registration will also give the cat a legal status so more can be done to protect them from irresponsible or neglectful owners, because the owners can be tracked via the database and made to account for their actions. It becomes much harder to 'just leave the cat behind'. However, the compulsory Council registration is designed to track down un-desexed pets or trace neglectful owners rather than reunite the cat with their owners in an emergency. The private database (run by the AAR) has been successfully reuniting owners and pets for many years, is available all day, every day, to every vet. Speak to us about which database is best for your cat.

# House training

**T**his is the delightful aspect of kittens, as mum has usually done all the work for you by the time your kitten is 3 – 4 weeks old!! However, to keep your pet comfortable in her toilette requirements, please take the following “rules of etiquette” into account – your cat will be happier with a litter tray in a quiet secluded place, away from where she eats (so a kitchen location is not ideal). She will also not appreciate sudden changes in the type of litter (some cats will only use one kind of litter, but a smattering of garden soil in the tray reminds them where to go). Be aware that the clay types of litter often have silicon in them, which produces coughing and asthma problems in some cats and people, and is the cause of the fatal disease “silicosis”. We have available a biodegradable, flushable litter specially bagged for us (once used, it is also perfect for composting) and several other varieties.

It is important to make your litter type selection early as some cats will refuse to use any new kinds once



they've established their preference, and will ignore new litter types for years rather than use the one they don't like. And please, clean out the messy bits frequently (if not the whole litter content) – cats do not like to go where they've been before! Finally, rinse well after disinfecting (use bleach diluted 1:10 for preference), as cats' sense of smell is much stronger than ours, and the smell of some deodorants almost seems to hurt their noses... The best disinfectant is actually a couple of hours airing with the inside of the tray exposed to the sun.

Loss of house-training is a very major issue for cat owners, and there are a few things to try if your pet stops using the litter tray. Try getting a second tray if your cat is very fussy about cleanliness, so they have a second choice if you are away a bit longer than usual. Or go back to the other kind of litter if you just changed types suddenly. Any changes in a cat's environment may cause stress, and the bladder seems to be the 'stress organ' for cats (we humans get headaches..!), so try to figure out what is new in the household. Do not move the litter tray suddenly... unless you have a very tolerant cat! Sometimes it is easier to put a tray where the cat is going to the toilette, rather than cause an emotional problem with finding a more suitable place! Most cats want privacy for their toilette, and covered trays often solve the problem.

If there is any blood in the urine or faeces, your cat needs urgent veterinary attention, so please phone if you are concerned.

# Outdoor cats

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# Indoor pets

# Keeping Cats Happy Inside

Cats can be happily kept inside all the time. Many People do so and would have it no other way. They say they have deeper and more satisfying relationships with their cats, and the cats are healthier and live longer. Whilst living happily inside, cats are not getting hit by cars, injured in cat fights, exposed to disease such as Feline Leukaemia and Feline AIDS, being stolen, hunting and possibly killing wildlife, urinating and defecating on neighbour's properties, nor harassing or being harassed by other animals. Clearly there are many good reasons for permanently keeping cats indoors.



However, many people feel that it is cruel to confine cats because they

## isn't it cruel

think of them as 'free spirits' that should be allowed to roam because of their nature. But the possible consequences are listed above. So how can we resolve this dilemma?

We can do so by enriching the daily life of the indoor cat to replace some of the stimulation and activity it would otherwise receive as a free-roaming animal.

The environmental enrichment puts complexity, unpredictability and choices into a cat's daily life.

Without these things many animals and people become frustrated in confinement and show signs of boredom – greater reactivity, irritability and exaggerated or unusual behaviour.

## how is it done

Environmental enrichment aims to satisfy a cat's need for interaction with its environment. This can be done in many ways, some of which suit some cats better than others. Cats are notoriously individualistic. Some activities involve the owner in active participation, whilst others just have to be set up and left for the cat to use when it wishes. By doing more for their cats, owners also enrich their own lives.

These suggestions are for normal healthy cats and you should discuss them with your veterinarian to make sure they are appropriate for your cat.

# chasing & jumping

Small fast moving objects cause the innate chase response in kittens. Most mature cats will continue to show it, particularly when they have practised all their lives. This can be done with small balls, such as practice golf balls that are hollow and have holes in the surface, or items such as scrunched up newspaper pulled quickly and erratically on the end of a string. You can get objects attached to the ends of poles so they can be cast and moved over a bigger area without the cat seeing you do it. Furry, feathery or flapping things are particularly attractive to cats. Patches of bright light, such as reflection from a watch face or mirror, often get cats chasing. A handheld laser pointer that gives a brilliant red light under any household conditions is a very convenient way of exercising cats. Some, particularly younger cats, will jump and strike at soap bubbles. Quite a few owners admit to playing and really enjoying hide-and-seek with their cats.

# feeding

We can make feeding more natural by getting them to search for food and by providing it in a form that needs chewing. If you feed dried food you could put it in small clumps around the house so the cat has to search them out. The food in the bowl can be made harder to eat – whole raw chicken wings (skin removed), corn cobs and a cube of tough meat exercise the teeth and clean the mouth as well as prolonging dinnertime.

Cats like a change to their diet – as long as it is highly palatable! They have been known to eat things such as

bread, pasta, raw vegetables, curry, mangoes and tomatoes. It is amazing what they will eat when it comes from the hand of someone they like. You can take advantage of this to do some training.

## obedience work

It might sound a bit radical but cats can be obedience trained with the same principles of positive reinforcement as dogs. Why do you think they suddenly appear when the refrigerator door is opened? That is not innate behaviour, it has been learnt. It's amazing what will be learnt when you are hungry and your behaviour results in food being given. Cats can easily be taught to come, sit, stay, lie down and retrieve. Reward the desired behaviour immediately it occurs. Break down the learning task into small steps and start at the beginning. Train with very small pieces of the most palatable food.

In this way your cat will just get a taste and not a full stomach which will satisfy its hunger. Once you have taught several commands, they can be randomised in order and times of day that they are given. Such a training session, particularly when working on a new command, will add complexity, unpredictability and choice to your cat's daily life.



## watch an interesting scene

Given the choice, cats will vote with their feet and show us that they like to watch a changing scene. They will choose to sit or lie for long periods in safe places where they can watch the world go by, whether it is street activity, people or animals. With a little bit of thought we can usually provide that safe and interesting area.

## high level walkways

One way cats can get to a vantage point is by jumping or climbing. You can make this easier and encourage them to use the height of the rooms by providing walkways between high points. Shelves can be strategically placed on walls or narrow pieces of timber placed between beams.

## indoor tree

A convenient way for cats to get access to high points is up a tall scratching post that they will climb as though it is a tree. If the cat cannot climb, for instance if it has moderate arthritis, then a series of shelves cut into post will allow the cat to climb from shelf to shelf.

## get-away areas

Given the chance, many cats will lie for long periods in small high places from where they can watch the activity below and presumably feel secure. It is a good idea to

provide access to such areas for anxious cats and where there is more than one cat in the house. This can easily be done by closing the lid of a cardboard box of suitable size (about 14"x12"x10" for the average cat). Turn it upside down and cut a hole in the middle of one end just big enough for the cat to get in and out. Put in an unwashed garment, such as an old sweatshirt of a favourite person, and place it in the highest accessible place in the house. Experiment with several in different places. The walkways, 'trees' and tall scratching posts can give access to these places.

## scratching posts

Cats can be trained to use a scratching post and not to use other surfaces for their stretching and scratching exercises. Cut pile carpet is an attractive surface through which they can drag their claws. However, a material that can be torn out is preferred. This may be a loosely woven material or a soft wood composition board. The scratchable surface could be firmly attached to a post at least 1 metre high that is firmly held in position, usually by a heavier base. The forefeet of kittens can be gently placed up the post and drawn down it. You can also demonstrate the use of the post to the kitten by dragging your own nails down the post, as kittens do learn by observation also. By rewarding the kitten with praise and stroking whilst it is scratching, and by food when it has finished, it usually quickly learns to exclusively use an attractive post.

Shouting at or spraying a cat with a water pistol is likely to reduce scratching when you are present.

However, scratching may well still be done in your absence. This can be diverted by putting the scratching post in front of the scratched surface, which has additionally been protected by a non-scratchable cover such as wood, steel or thick plastic, or try bubble wrapping it. Reward the cat, in the same way as for the kitten, for using the post. When it is using the post consistently, move it (less than one foot per day) towards an acceptable position. As cats tend to stretch and scratch after a rest, the post is best placed near the cat's sleeping area. You may find it helps to have a scratch post in each room. Once the cat is using the post in the new position, the protection over the scratched area can be removed.

If the cat returns to that area, it means that its surface is more attractive than the post. You then need to make the post more attractive (catnip) and the other surface less attractive (there are some repellent sprays, and also 'paddle' mousetraps which go off without damaging the cat when they touch the surface).

Regular nail-trimming (fortnightly) reduces the effects of scratching, or attaching soft plastic tips over the end of the nails ('Soft Paws') helps reduce damage.

There are different attitudes to de-clawing.

Currently, removal of claws is not acceptable unless the only other option is euthanasia.

# paper bags and boxes

They say that ‘Curiosity killed the cat’ and

watching cats check out newly arrived containers shows how keen they are to investigate. Allowing them access to these new shapes and smells will add novelty to their lives.

## entertainment box (busy-kitty or cat-track)

Taking advantage of their well-known tendency to investigate things with their paws, we can put small objects or balls inside a box in which there are holes where the cat can put its paws through to play, but which are hard to actually remove the objects through.

## cat nip, cat mint and cat grasses

These plants can be successfully grown indoors in pots from seeds or small plants that are commercially available. Many cats will visit a catnip plant each day to sniff, rub, grasp, roll and kick alongside it. This seems to be play and can be shown by both sexes of reproductive age, whether or not they have been desexed. Cat mint and cat grasses (basically budgie seed mixes planted in a suitable box and watered) are more likely to be chewed than other plants in the house, and provide fresh vegetation to eat, as they would do outside.

## trips outside

Most cats enjoy a trip outside whether it is on a lead and harness, in their owner's arms, or (some cats!) in the car.

They can be trained to walk on a lead by reinforcing the walking forward with tiny pieces of favourite food. The differing sights smells and sounds add to daily variation and stimulation.

## outdoor enclosures

Various structures can be used to allow cats out into fresh air while restricting their access to certain areas.

Wire netting can be used to enclose an area alongside a house, just like a bird aviary. Enclosures of different sizes can be used in different sites with tunnels between them and the house. A modular system ('Cat Module Parks') allows configuration to suit and expansion for a wide range of circumstances.

## companion cat

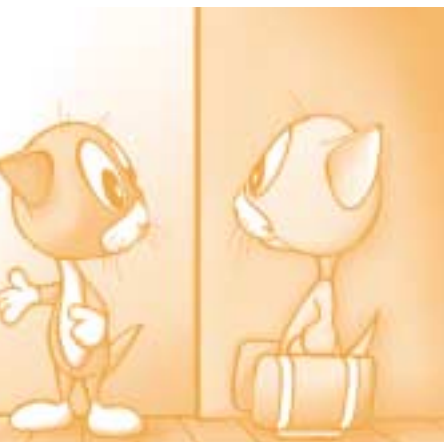
For cats that are left on their own for long periods each day, it is a good idea to provide a feline companion. Sociable interaction will enrich their daily lives.

The younger they are introduced, the greater the chances of their getting on amicably most of the time (after about two years old, acceptance is a bit random, but they rarely totally reject another cat long-term). There may be fights and chases that are not playful but seem to be a part of normal living. Getting litter mates gives you the best chances of a pair getting on. Where other cats are introduced it is



preferable to do so with kittens. The ‘curiosity factor’ can be used to advantage by locking the newcomer in a room to themselves with litter tray and food bowl, for two days before introducing the resident cat to them, especially if the resident is older than about six months.

This gives the new cat a place to hide, plus some of its smell will be on you and in the room, giving it confidence. The resident cat will also have become a bit used to the newcomer's smell as well. Urine-spraying and fighting are less likely when all the cats are desexed female as compared to having one or more desexed males in the house. Bringing older cats together, particularly where one has been resident for some time, may lead to hissing and fighting, defecation and urination outside the litter tray, urine spraying and one or more cats becoming reclusive. Tolerance can increase with time and by using such methods as: feeding them progressively closer together, rubbing them alternately with the same unwashed towel to



transfer their smells between each other, and with anti-depressant or other drugs (in the short term). Having more than three cats in the same household greatly increases the chances of behaviour problems.

# what are the problems of indoor living

Clearly problems can occur with keeping cats confined all the time. Cats that are suddenly confined to their home may pace and vocalise at the time and place they usually get out. This is the time when they would benefit from chasing play. Scratching furniture and intolerance between cats has been discussed. Jumping or walking on surfaces can be prevented by strategic placement of 'paddle' mouse traps, double-sided sticky tape or a low voltage mat that gives the cat a mild buzzing shock when they land on it. Litter tray problems and aggression to people and other animals is a manifestation of frustration and boredom, which can be treated, usually just by implementing these environmental enrichment principles.

## conclusion

Keeping cats permanently indoors requires more effort on your part. However, the more you do for your cat, the more the cat will reward you. Many clients have told me that this program is lots of fun – and their cats like it too!



**City living**

**can make  
you**

**CRAZY**

**even if you  
are a Cat**

**(also called The Concept of "Four  
Points of Contact")**

**H**ave you ever thought about how different our world is today for our pets? We often complain about our ‘sped up lives’, and the loss of community and recreational spaces. How often do you get to a spontaneous backyard barbie anymore? Well, it’s even harder for your pets. If upwards of 10% of Sydneysiders can’t cope (which is the ‘old name’ for the modern epidemic of depression..), then it is really not surprising that a similar number of cats can’t cope with the new rules of city living.

For Millennia, cats lived in small communities of related females, with males visiting seasonally to do what men do. Kittens were raised communally, and not many survived. Evenings were spent hunting for mice and rats, and avoiding bigger predators. Life was pretty short and brutal (wild cats only live to about 5 years old), and filled with parasites (internal and external), poisons and other dangers.

On the up side, it was a mile between cats, males covered the territory of three to ten female colonies, plus interaction between ‘outsider’ cats was infrequent and usually made via smell (urine and facial pheromones).

Today, our cats are confined, castrated and made to interact with lots of humans and other cats. Their lives have been radically changed, and the thing to remember is how well most cats have adapted. However, we seem to see nearly every one of the ones that can’t cope, because they get their owner’s attention by peeing around the place (including on their owner’s heads in rare instances... that’s

guaranteed to get a reaction!). Or else they regularly fight with other cats or people, spend their lives hiding, or pee blood in the bathtub. I sometimes wonder if there is an earlier stage that these cats go through trying to get their message across, but we don't get the message till the signs are blatant!

Fortunately, we are getting cluier about cats, and there are a number of 'behavior modifying' drugs and techniques to help the 'stressed out kitty'.



Antidepressants are the big step forward, but we are actually moving in on the 'smell' front as well (with Feliway and Felifriend). Returning to the

'natural state' of cats, most messages came via the nose, so triggering 'happy thoughts' via 'good smells' (eg pheromones) is starting to get a

look in. In the recent past, cats were 'bombed out' of caring about their problems with sedatives, in much the same way as housewives in 'Valium Valley' used to be – no progress with the problem made, but the symptoms disappear. These days for cats, instigating a bit of behavioral therapy also helps – structuring 'playtime' and 'feeding times' into regular and reliable events reduces the anxiety that a lot of cats feel when their owners are away or have irregular timetables. Our cats are much more likely to spend the majority of their day indoors now, and this

promotes longevity and physical health. However, it does place a greater burden to care for the mental health of the cat on the owner rather than the environment.

Hardly anyone lets their kids walk to school alone (or even walk there at all), nor lets them play on the roads either – and very sensible too. However, it means that the energy that was used up in running about outside for kids and cats has to be redirected. Some cats redirect appropriately, some don't.

Some breeds of cats cope better with a sedentary existence than others.

However, all of the cats who have problems are much-loved, and it is nice to be able to either modify the environment so the cat can



cope (eg tell the boyfriend

to leave – and 85% of cat owners would!), or modify the cat's response to stress by raising their anxiety threshold (with drugs). I've observed that no cat ever changed – there has to be change around them so that they can cope! It was ever thus – dogs get trained, cats train their owners (but only 'for our own good' ... well maybe not purely..).

It has been shown that antidepressants don't work nearly as well if there is no effort applied to changing the environment and routine for the cat so it can cope better. We used to 'randomise' interactions with cats, on the basis

that Nature had no timetable. However, that turns out to be wrong for cats, and we need to treat them more like they are ‘in gaol’ – i.e. guarantee structure in their day.

There are riots in gaol if dinner is late, and the inmates are not happy if they don’t get their exercise time. It is the same for cats, and especially the stressed ones. They need to know that they will get your FULL ATTENTION four times a day – two feeding times and two playtimes.

More specifically, the feeding times need to be the same (within three minutes!) whether it is during the week, the weekend or holidays, and they need to be when you are ‘leaving’ so the cat looks forward to your departure rather than being anxious about your return. Thus, breakfast is put out when you leave for work (not when you get up in the morning – this stops most of the ‘cat as alarm clock’ problem also), and in the evening when you go to bed (rather than when you walk through the door). Your cat will then have a few more ‘cues’ about feed time and won’t be anxious that you have forgotten. Remember, cats pee in strange places when they are anxious or need to get our attention badly, so effort put into the ‘timetable’ will have many unseen rewards also!

The two playtimes, especially for indoor cats, should be 20 minutes long (and that is like 20 minutes on an exercise bicycle – it can feel like forever!), and pairs of cats should have individual games with you at least some of the time. Remember, they selfishly (like all our relatives..!) want our FULL AND UNDIVIDED ATTENTION at least sometimes.

The two playtimes need to be at approximately the same time each day also. That way, the cat saves up energy for it rather than pestering you ALL the time.

If your cat likes grooming (and most cats do if it doesn't hurt them – some will even 'self groom' against a comb you hold for them), then you can use some of the playtime as 'bonding time' with grooming, especially for older cats who think you're nuts if you want to play with toys for 20 minutes!



One of the essential things to remember, is you don't have to get it completely correct all of the time. It is amazing how much pressure is relieved by even being aware of the cat's needs – for structure, routine and affection – and that by instigating even little changes, a great deal can be achieved for your cat's mental and emotional health!!

# The cat isn't using the litter tray

**T**his is really breaking the unwritten rule of cat ownership, and is very distressing for everyone. It is also a very common cause of euthanasia or abandonment of cats, so is a problem to be taken very seriously. The following is a brief outline of the common causes of breakdown in 'house training', but if these efforts don't work, then medical and often behavioural intervention is required.

An understanding of cat communication is essential – they are VERY SMELL ORIENTED. Cats use urine and faeces to post messages for other cats (and their humans, whom they do actually regard as being slightly incompetent cats, according to some research). Cat urine, especially, always gets attention, and if you compare it to people – some people

have loud voices or shout when they want their opinion noticed, cats use urine to try to tell us about their problems and some have stronger urine than others. A key point here is that if a cat pees or poops on your bed, it's because they love you (usually), so take it as a compliment (!) but then move on to establishing behaviour that you can live with. The sooner the problem is addressed the better, because once there is a learned to component to the behaviour, and it becomes ingrained, it is a habit and is much harder to break the cycle.

## House - soiling by cats

(from Robert J Holmes handouts)

Cats sometimes urinate and / or defaecate within the house in sites that are unacceptable to the human residents. This is usually outside the litter tray, but some cats that normally eliminate outside the house do so inside. The cat may or may not have been successfully trained to use the tray. Elimination may be at a regular site or sites, or may be apparently random throughout the house. Spraying or marking territory is done in 'socially significant' places such as entries and exits, doorways and windows or even on a person's clothes or bedding.

# possible causes

- **Incontinence** – loss of bowel or bladder control can result in elimination at other sites, so a complete health check by the vet is the first step to address the problem.
- **Lack of Houstraining** – There is often a history of incomplete houstraining, where the cat has never consistently used the litter tray over long periods. A change in environment can be sufficient to break the partially formed habit. Some cats are particularly difficult to houstrain with the usual methods (reputedly Persians especially) or may have unusual requirements, such as a covered litter tray or one without any litter at all.
- **Dirty Litter** – there is considerable variation between cats in the amount of urine or faeces that will prevent them from using the litter tray. Some cats will not defaecate in a tray with urine or faeces in it. Other cats will urinate but not defaecate in a tray already containing urine.
- **Different Litter** – A abrupt change in litter may be the cause, go back to the original litter and try changing over slowly (over 2 weeks or more) by mixing the old and the new.
- **Proximity of food** – feeding cats beside the litter tray is likely to stop use of the tray. This can be used effectively to stop cats eliminating in other areas by turning them into feeding or bed sites.
- **Conditioned to other surfaces** – Some cats learn or

inately prefer to eliminate only on certain areas such as carpet, polythene and concrete.

- **Anxiety** – Many cats that house-soil are anxiety prone. Cats vary considerably in their individual tendency to be anxious, and some are born with a genetic tendency to anxiety. Others become socially incompetent due to early kittenhood experiences (kittens form most of their impressions of the world at 2 - 7 weeks of age, and at that time, a lack of good experiences – especially with humans – is as harmful as actual traumatic experiences). Cats may show a breakdown in normal elimination habits when there has been a change in environment, such as a member of the household leaving or a person or new pet arriving. Sometimes the cats eliminate on the bed or pillow of the person to whom they are most attached that has left the house. The presence of strange cats outside, or particularly inside the house (eg a neighbourhood bully cat gets through the catflap) can cause a breakdown in elimination pattern.
- **Conditioned avoidance** – cats may avoid the litter tray after having a noxious experience such as being attacked by another cat or pilled by a person while using the tray. Dogs sniffing them while they are in the tray or noises such as spin cycles of the washing machine also disrupt them.

# treatment options

It is preferable to reduce or eliminate the causes whenever possible. Unfortunately it is not always possible to identify or do anything about them, and often there is more than one cause.

- **Treat Incontinence** – especially a problem in older cats or those with dietary allergies.
- **Prevent other cats entering** – Strange cats can be kept out by fitting the resident with a magnetic collar which activates the lock on their cat door. Otherwise, block off the cat flap and let your cat in and out by hand.
- **Keep Litter Clean** – It is always a good idea to keep litter scrupulously clean, and often an extra litter tray is all that is required. Faeces should be removed immediately it is seen or smelt, and to completely replace the litter once a day. There are many types of litter available, from very fine gravel-type (the one about 50% of cats have a preference for), through several types of clumping and biodegradable types. Be aware that a lot of cats do NOT like the ‘deodorized’ type as it is designed for our noses not theirs.
- **Provide a Covered Litter Tray** – Some cats want complete privacy for their toilette – you can try a cardboard box over the top of the tray with a door cut in it. Be aware that this makes it more difficult to see and smell waste products, and the smell can build up enough to repel the cat. Charcoal filtered covers are available.

- **Clean soiled areas** – For your own residential enjoyment you will probably wish to remove the sight and smell of the deposits. Removal of the odour is particularly important when soiling is done repeatedly in the same place. There are several very effective products available at the clinic. It can, however, be up to 4 weeks to actually have the smell disappear for the cat – remember their noses are more sensitive than ours, and their urine is designed to ‘hang around’ as a message centre. **NEVER USE DISINFECTANTS** (especially ammonia-based ones), as it then smells like a tiger has come and pee’d in their house and it upsets cats even more.
- **Provide Extra Litter trays** – Put litter trays over repeatedly soiled areas. Once there is consistent use, you can merge them into one tray, and move it (very slowly, 5 cm at a time sometimes) to where you want the tray. You may need one tray per cat plus one extra in multicat households. Also place trays in secure, private places away from food and foot traffic.
- **Reduce Anxiety** – Initiate more regular TLC (Tender Loving Care) contact, in a structured format (see ‘Four Points of Contact’). Reliability of contact is the key. Some cats may require a trial period with antidepressant / antianxiety drugs to start them back on the path of reusing the tray regularly.
- **Rehousetrain** – Initially, when unsupervised, your cat can be confined to a very small area and progressively allowed more space to live in once tray use is consistent.

You may have to start with an area as small as a cupboard, often the bathroom will suffice. The cat can be let out for eating and TLC, and while supervised (some cats even need to be on a harness and lead to prevent them rushing over to their previous toilet areas). Once the tray has been consistently used for 4 days, the area available to the cat can be increased.

Loss of housetraining is a serious problem. Cats never ‘make mistakes’ when it comes to using the litter tray. There is always a message for us, but because we can’t always really understand their thoughts and motivations, we have to try to guess the message or the problem. Trial and error is the only way we can attempt this – it is not possible to ‘get it right’ first time every time. However, consistency, observation and perseverance will result in nearly every cat becoming a pleasurable pet again.

# General tips

**K**ittens will get into the most amazing places! Whether they get into trouble depends a bit on you! One of the main sources of difficulty is string and thread – once a kitten has something in her mouth, the rasps on her tongue make it hard to spit a thread out, and she will very quickly swallow it. If it gets tangled in her intestine, it will tear internal organs and cause a huge problem. So no unsupervised string games, and be careful of the thread around a roast as that is tasty and fun. Rubber bands carry a similar warning!

And please check your washing machine and dryer before turning them on (or leave their doors firmly closed) as many cats have been sleeping comfortably in a pile of laundry, only to find themselves in real trouble when the machines go on. A deadly place to nap.

Many drugs are very hazardous to your cat. They are very susceptible to poisoning by an assortment of everyday chemicals and drugs. **DO NOT PUT ANYTHING ON YOUR CAT'S COAT THAT HAS NOT BEEN AUTHORISED BY YOUR VET.** Your cat will lick it off, and could make herself very ill. In fact, the most common way a cat gets poisoned is to walk through a substance,

then lick it off her coat. And please, **DO NOT GIVE YOUR CAT ANY MEDICATION NOT SPECIFICALLY MADE FOR CATS.** Painkillers in particular destroy cats' livers and kidneys, and using them can turn a small problem into a fatal one. Especially dangerous is Paracetamol (Panadeine etc.) and aspirin.

Kittens need a great deal of time devoted to their social requirements, and it is called Playtime! If yours is a Solo Cat, then you need to set aside at least 20 minutes twice a day for intensive, to the point of exhaustion type play. It is easier on your hands if you use a fishing pole with an attached toy, or the wire and ball sets. Try throwing balls (some cats quickly learn to fetch!) and other interactive toys. All the play skills are basically hunting preliminaries (this is totally natural and it would be inappropriate to try to change it), so hide-and-seek is excellent also. Of course, your **SCRATCHING POST** is also a source of excitement for your kitten! **TWO KITTENS** are easier to raise, especially if you are away for more than eight hours a day regularly (and even more important if yours is a 10 - 12 hour workday), as they can keep each other company, and may wander less if they are allowed out while you are



away. For totally indoor cats, these socialising requirements are close to essential, as you, their owner, are providing all their mental stimulation, and bored cats do go a bit crazy (there is even a term behaviourists use called Separation Anxiety seen in cats and dogs who can't bear for their owners to be away--by that stage another pet will not help). If you find your kitten is attacking your feet and getting a bit too violent when they play – consider another cat (!), or increase the intensity of your playtime, using toys not your



hands or feet, and show them that rough play is wrong (hold them by the scruff like mother cat would, shake firmly – not violently– and GROWL “no”! or HISS!! It gets their attention every time).

Most cats will accept a new kitten if they are less than two years old, and the sex of the other cat does not seem to be important. Our guideline is to pick another kitten that loves you, then go from there!

A further hint for socialising your kitten is to feed her on your lap for a few days (using dried food on a flat dish), so that you become mother cat. It means you cannot leave the dried food out all the time (take it up when you go to bed, so she is hungry for breakfast) and again when you come home (so she is hungry later in mid-evening). It usually only takes a couple of days, especially if you combine it with SOCIAL GROOMING with a flea comb!

# Hunting

**Y**ou can't help admiring the versatile skills that cats have, and sadly, they are often very efficient hunters. However, there is increasing evidence that urban cats mostly catch introduced animals like mice, rats, sparrows and thrushes, and in the city do not have such a big impact on the native fauna. However, there are some techniques which can be used to reduce a cat's efficiency.

Collars with TWO BELLS do make it considerably harder to sneak up on birds, although some really expert cats can glide through the grass so smoothly that they don't jangle them. There is a special 'beeping' collar called the Liberator that reduces bird hunting effectiveness by 80%. It makes it easier for the cat to catch rodents though because the beeping noise the collar makes when the cats jump actually attracts a rodent's attention and immobilises it for a split second.

Curfews for cats are being considered by councils. There are many difficulties implementing such a system, but there is actually a great deal of benefit to be derived from keeping your cat indoors, especially at night. The nocturnal animals are safe, your cat is less likely to be run over or stray, and you have a guaranteed warm comforter in residence! Consider closing the catflap at dinnertime, it may save more than you realise.

Permanent indoor living is also a reasonable option. If a cat does not go out at all for the first year of life, they are usually quite content to remain a completely indoor cat. Many cats in other cities live a happy and full life either in flats, or in houses but going out under supervision or even on a harness and lead. The additional benefit is that if a cat has not learned to hunt by the age of a year, she is unlikely to acquire a great deal of skill and will not be a threat.

Desexing your cat is one of the best deterrents also, as there are no kittens to feed, nor have to find homes for (where they may not be kept from hunting).

Back in Egyptian times, the contract that mankind had with cats was that in return for being worshipped and sheltered, cats would catch the mice and rats that were eating the Great Grain Stores which were the feature of the new civilisation. Cats have kept their side of the bargain, but we keep changing ours – we want the cats for their companionship and non-verbal communication, for the unconditional love we keep hoping we're getting from them. They need our respect as much as our love and attention and food. Enjoy your cat's company, she may be with you for TWENTY YEARS...!

**YOUR CAT CAN BE PROTECTED BY:** Desexing, Flu & Enteritis vaccination, Leukaemia vaccination, Heartworm tablets, monthly Flea Control, Worming for Intestinal worms, Worming for Tapeworms, Identichip, Keeping in at Night and Raw Bones for teeth.

# What's the Fuss over Feline Fibre?

**(or Feline Fibre – a new fad?)**

**A**pparently it's all about stool quality – and I don't mean footstools... There is an official stool quality grading system (1 to 5) and there are people assigned to assess same in dogs and cats (the Kings of England also had a Keeper of the Stool!), at the various nutrition centres around the world. In healthy cats, fibre is

not an essential ingredient, but I guess if you return the the concept of a “natural diet” for cats, then the process of peeling mice prior to consuming them would have to provide fibre in the form of fur. I have not been able to find a figure on the proportion of soluble to insoluble fibre in mouse coats, but in quality commercial dried diets, 1:3 provides a desirable stool quality.

## soluble vs insoluble fibre

It seems to me that whenever a debate rages over a narrow field, there is probably not enough difference to warrant the energy of discussion, otherwise, the winner/better solution would be clear! It seems to depend on which fibre first took your research fancy as to whether it solves your problems, and human research is not always as helpful for felines as it is for dogs. So, soluble fibre is a complex carbohydrate that makes it past the cat’s digestive processes intact, and gets fermented in the large intestine so does not contribute to the calorie intake of the cat, but does feed the bacteria in the bowel. Insoluble fibre gets past everybody in the bowel and is deposited unchanged (a bit wetter) in the litter tray. What either of these types of fibre do for digestion of the other ingredients in the diet, or for general maintenance of the mucosal lining of the bowel, is the subject of debate.

There are a number of cats whose health is improved by increasing the amount fibre in their diets. These cats have “fibre responsive diseases”, and it doesn’t mean that every cat needs more fibre. It can actually be quite convenient to

find stools in the litter tray only once a week when some cats have to (temporarily) live on a meat-only diet! Some other cats have to have a very “low residue” (fibre-free) diet for other reasons, so there is a spectrum. Thus the current list of fibre responsive problems is:

This is the centre of the soluble vs insoluble regime debate. The fibre is used to allow the cat to eat the same volume of food without consuming the same number of calories. Both types of fibre do that, and each camp borders on vitriolic over what the other camp is doing to uptake of other nutrients and satiety, but suffice to say, cats will lose weight on either variety of reduced calorie compositions.



However, you still have to feed the cat at 60% of the calorie requirement of the cat **AT THE WEIGHT YOU WANT THE CAT TO BE!** This turns out to be a very small amount, and most cats are very difficult to live with during the dieting time. We usually recommend you just try to have the intake reduced by 10-20% so the cat

doesn't gain any more weight. Obesity makes cats prone to diabetes but otherwise there is no downside to being a pretty happy fat old cat, except where the main problem is grooming themselves.

And sometimes, problems with grooming are related to arthritis as much as obesity in an old cat.

**obesity**

## FIV colitis

Cats with Feline Aids can develop diarrhoea, sometimes with blood in it. Increasing the amount of fibre of either type makes their life easier.

## food allergy colitis

Also called Irritable Bowel Syndrome – some cats have a problem with protein types in their food. Some are allergic to fish, others to beef and milk, but it can be to almost anything. The main symptom is blood on the faeces (red blood, on the outside), and can be associated with diarrhoea also. Once all the other problems causing these symptoms are eliminated, changing the food and adding fibre (especially psyllium husk—natural is eaten by more cats, but some can be conned into the Unflavoured Metamucil—you will never get them to eat the citrus-flavoured one) keeps the problem at bay.

## diabetes mellitus

Insoluble fibre (wheat bran) was the first step in dietary control, then it moved to soluble fibre (oat bran) and now for cats it is moving to highly digestible protein. Things change in this area as more about CAT diabetes is discovered as opposed to extrapolated from dogs or humans.

## constipation vs megacolon

Constipation vs Megacolon—these conditions have been considered as part of the same problem, but there is now some discussion that constipation is a separate problem

and does not lead inevitably to Megacolon. Constipation on its own, where the faeces is hard, dry and passed irregularly, does benefit from the addition of fibre (again psyllium husk, which is classified as soluble, but insoluble has helped in the past), which retains water in the stool and allows for the more regular passage of a softer faeces just because the bowel fills quicker to stimulate movement. Megacolon is when the bowel has lost its muscular tone (possibly due to degeneration of the nerves that stimulate its motility) so the faeces sits around for a long time because it doesn't get pushed along. The faecal balls become bigger, as does the colon diameter, and eventually the cat is unable to pass anything. This requires medical intervention in the form of flushing the faeces out (usually under anaesthetic) and following up with increased fibre diet and drugs which stimulate bowel movement. Eventually, these also stop working and then surgical removal of the nonfunctional section of the colon is needed for the cat to return to health. This procedure goes in and out of favour, but the techniques are now refined and do not leave the cat with longterm diarrhoea anymore.

So whence goes nutrition from here? We're all living a much more 'refined' life these days, and commercial foods are here to stay. I think it is encouraging that the food producers are investigating the 'special needs' of cats so closely at last, and their research is improving life for lots of cats. However, the perfect package is still a mouse, and I always take my comparisons back to that.

# Biography

**Dr. Kim Kendall BVSc, MACVSc (feline medicine)**

## **FAQ's**

### **Why do you just work with cats?**

I came to cats via elephants, goats and pigs. I trained at Sydney Uni and got my degree (BVSc) in 1982. During my training, I 'fell in love' with goats (particularly angoras) and pigs. Elephant vets are a rare necessity, so I decided to work with more frequently encountered animals.

I went to England to work with sheep and goats. However, I drifted into 'companion animal' practice (especially after realising that all 'large animal' vets have bad backs...).

Cats seemed to be neglected at that time – not much you could do for a sick cat, though they were very good surgical patients and could heal almost any trauma.

I started to 'dig deeper' into feline medicine, and discovered an affinity both with cats and their owners. It took 10 years to bring all the necessary ingredients together to form the Cat Clinic, but eventually it was opened in 1994.

### **What about the elephants?**

We (husband John Linquist) went to Zimbabwe to work for six months in 1991, and went 'game watching' in many of the parks in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa.

There is no equivalent to seeing an elephant in the African bush, but intervention causes more harm than good many times, and we came away with an awareness of elephant ecology, but no ‘hands on’ vet work. We had an interlude in the USA, working on Cape Cod for 18 months (and going whale watching on weekends), and during that time became friends with the vet who looked after the animals at Ringling Bros. Circus. We got to ride the circus elephants through the streets of Boston – twice. Unsurpassed experience.

### **Where to from here?**

The Cat Clinic has evolved as a truly distinctive, organic, entity. We (all the staff at the Cat Clinic) are driven by the desire to make a better world for cats in general, and to help the cats who come in contact with us, via, of course, their everwilling owners. The ‘Cat Adoption Centre’ has evolved from an altruistic endeavour to ‘home out a few kittens’, to an Australia-wide movement funded and encouraged by the Petcare Advisory Service and Whiskas®. We are very proud of having created the prototype which is now in 100 other veterinary clinics. The closer bond that we all form by being ‘foster parents’ to all the kittens that we send out, with love, to their new owners, gives a real sense of community in this ‘rat race’ and often superficial modern world. This sense of belonging is one we try to share with all our clients, no matter where their cats come from and understanding, as they do, that humans are here for the benefit of cats... As W. George pointed out, cats get food without effort, shelter without confinement and love without penalties.

Who’s working for whom?

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