



## Health Care for Kittens and Cats

As a responsible pet owner, it is important to be aware of the following health and wellbeing issues. Always practice good sanitary habits and wash your hands thoroughly after interaction with your pets.

**Vaccination**: It is important to protect your kittens and cats against three most common serious diseases- *Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Feline Calicivirus and Feline Panleukopenia*

For your kitten and cat to be fully protected against these diseases they will require:

Vaccination	Age
1 <sup>st</sup>	10 – 12 weeks of age
2 <sup>nd</sup>	14 – 16 weeks of age
Annual booster vaccination one year after second booster	Every 12 months until 3 years of age then frequency after discussion with the veterinarian

Your kitten should be kept away from unvaccinated cats and kittens who are not siblings and areas where unvaccinated cats could have been until two weeks after their final vaccination. Additional vaccines are sometimes considered and include Feline Leukemia Virus – these should be discussed with your veterinarian.

**Intestinal Worms**: Treatment for intestinal worms is very important. Kittens that are not treated for worms can become very sick and sometimes die. Some intestinal worms can also be spread from cats to humans (particularly *hookworms, roundworms* and certain *tapeworms*).

Kittens require more regular deworming than adult cats:

- Kittens **2-12 weeks old** should be dewormed **every 2 - 3 weeks**.
- Kittens **3-6 months old** should be dewormed **once a month**.
- Kittens **6 - 12 months** should be dewormed at least **every three months**.
- After one year of age discuss with your veterinarian an appropriate deworming schedule.

**Heartworm**: Heartworm is a disease that affects dogs and occasionally cats. The heartworm larvae are **spread by mosquitoes**. The larvae develop into adults and live inside the heart and associated vessels – in dogs untreated this eventually develops into heart failure, in cats we commonly see respiratory signs. You should take the time to discuss this with your veterinarian and decide if and what preventive product to use.

**Fleas**: Fleas are a common cause of anaemia (they feed on blood), skin irritation and itchiness. They can also help to transmit certain parasites to your cat such a tapeworm. **Flea control** is recommended for all household pets. Please note: **DOG PRODUCTS SHOULD NEVER BE USED ON CATS AS THEY CAN CAUSE TOXIC REACTIONS**. Lots of different products are available for flea control and they can often be combined with an intestinal wormer. Be careful if you use flea collars or flea products that are available in the supermarket, as some of these products are generally ineffective and often unsafe. Flea shampoo can assist in removing a heavy burden of fleas but does not eliminate fleas nor have residual effect once the hair-coat is dry.

**Ticks:** Ticks are uncomfortable for your cat and can cause damage to their skin. Tick infestations are not commonly seen on healthy cats. Ticks feed on your pet's blood and heavy tick infestations can cause anaemia (insufficient red blood cells), they are also responsible for the spread of certain diseases. You should check your pet for ticks every day and gently remove any that you find.

Do not attempt to remove ticks using boiling water or fire. Some products are available that treat both ticks and fleas; and some products can last up to 6 months – these generally need veterinary approval.

Fleas and ticks live in your pet's environment. You should regularly treat their bedding and living area with an appropriate insecticide, as well as vacuum +/- or launder bedding and surfaces. Talk to your veterinarian for information about what products are effective and safe to use.



**Neutering (also called castration in males, spay in females or desexing):** It is strongly recommended that you neuter your cats. This minimises the risk of certain unwanted behaviours such as roaming, aggression, fights and other accidents. It prevents your pet from contributing to the population of unwanted stray animals. Spaying or neutering also helps prevent many life-threatening diseases such as abscesses and infections. Kittens should have this surgery **between 5-6 months of age** but, it is never too late for any adult pet. Neutering involves having the cat undergo a routine surgery, under general anaesthetic. Most pets undergoing this surgery are released to go home with their families the same day. Talk to your vet if you have any concerns or questions about anaesthesia and surgery. If you keep your cat for breeding be aware that responsible breeders never turn their animal out to breed unsupervised. The drive to mate is biologic to reproduce, not for sexual gratification. Your neutered cat will be a better feline companion and get into far less trouble than an unneutered cat.

**Diet:** Good nutrition is very important for healthy growth and development. You can buy commercial food that is meant to be specially designed to meet the nutritional needs of your growing kitten and adult cats. You should feed kittens food for growth until they reach 8 – 12 months of age after which cats can then go onto adult food. In Fiji it is common to feed home-cooked food and most cats do very well on this diet - this consists of a mixture of majority cooked meat or fish, with a small percentage of carbohydrates (rice, potato, bread) and vegetables. Cats have diet requirements more like carnivores (meat eaters).

Kittens require more regular feeding than cats and should be fed:

- **3 – 4 small meals a day** between 6 and 12 weeks of age
- **2 - 3 meals a day** when 12 weeks to 6 months of age
- **Daily food split into 2 meals a day** when older than 6 months

**Do not feed:**

- cooked bones – especially fish bones, long chicken bones or small pork bones as these can splinter and cause damaged digestive tract or blockages
- Do not feed rotten or spoiled food – they can get tummy aches and food poisoning just like us.
- Do not feed chocolate, coffee, onions, garlic, grapes, yeast dough, raisins, nuts or alcohol as some can cause illness and others death
- Avoid feeding raw eggs on a daily basis as this can result in a biotin deficiency. Cooked eggs however provide a great source of protein, fats and other nutrients

**Housing:** Pets should have shelter from the weather available to them at all times. This includes shade from the sun and warm bedding if it is cold. Your pet's home should be elevated off the ground to prevent moisture accumulation from the ground, or rain leaking in. They should have clean fresh water available at all times. Neutering your cat will be the single most important thing you can do to keep your cat safely at home.

**Socialisation:** Cats need time and space to get comfortable with their surroundings, and people. Play is important to help establish a good bond and trust. Take the time with your cat to help groom and check out what can be very hidden body parts – this keeps you aware of your cats' health.

**First Aid:** SPCA has a website with a work in progress to provide first aid instruction for some of the more common situations we come across here in Fiji so please stay tuned to this site

**Transporting your cat:** Get or make a secure carrier to transport your cat. Small and cozy will make them feel safe and comfortable. Your cat is comfortable in your arms at home, but will more than likely run away or scratch and bite you if something frightens it (loud noise, strangers, barking dog, children screaming, loud bus or truck and many more). Furthermore, it is extremely unsafe to travel with a loose pet in your car. A scenario which has caused many accidents is a cat trying to find a safe spot and gets right under your brake pedal. Secure your cat safely for travel.



Helpful Websites include:

SPCA Fiji Islands <https://www.spcfiji.com/>

Feline Health Center <https://www.vet.cornell.edu/departments-centers-and-institutes/cornell-feline-health-center/health-information>

<https://catvets.com/guidelines/client-brochures>

CAPC – Companion Animal Parasite Council <https://capcvet.org/guidelines>

TroCCAP - Tropical Council for Companion Animal parasites <https://www.troccap.com/>

<http://csu-cvmb.colostate.edu/vth/small-animal/community-practice/Pages/owner-care.aspx>