

All About Pets

The national pet care information service



CARING FOR YOUR KITTEN



THE BLUE CROSS

Britain's pet charity

All kittens are adorable and it can be tempting to take one home without thinking of the consequences. Remember that just like children they can be destructive and demanding. Taking on a kitten means committing yourself to at least 14 years of caring for a cat – and some live well into their teens and twenties.

Bringing your kitten home

Moving to a new home is stressful for a kitten. Give it reassurance and time to adjust to the new surroundings before making introductions to other animals in the household. Make sure it knows where the bed, litter tray and food bowl are. Keep all the doors and windows closed and put a guard in front of the fireplace.



Your kitten's bed should be warm, dry, comfortable and draught free. There are many types of bed to choose from or you can put some bedding inside a cardboard box with a hole cut in the side. A large pen (a kittening pen or the type of metal pen used to hold dogs securely in the back of a car) is ideal for providing a safe den for the kitten and can hold its litter tray and bed. It is also an excellent way to introduce other animals. For more information see our leaflet *Introducing your cat to the family*.

Feeding

Feed your kitten on the same food it has been used to, as a sudden change of diet can cause stomach upsets. If you want to change the diet, do so gradually by mixing it with the kitten's usual food. Kittens have small stomachs and need to be fed little and often. You can buy foods that have been specially formulated for kittens, because they have different nutritional needs to the fully-grown cat. Read and follow the feeding instructions carefully. Do not give your kitten cow's milk as it can cause diarrhoea. Fresh clean drinking water should be available at all times.

Toilet training

You will need a plastic litter tray filled with sand, peat or cat litter available from pet shops. Never use earth from the garden as it may harbour diseases from other cats. Place the tray on newspaper in a quiet accessible corner. Show your kitten where the tray is when it wakes up from a sleep, after meals or when it looks as if it is about to go!

Keep the tray clean and empty it regularly. Some disinfectants are toxic to cats so use only hot water and detergent or a cat-friendly disinfectant – your vet will advise you. Rinse the tray thoroughly.

Going outside

Your kitten should not be allowed outside until at least a week after it has finished his first course of vaccinations at about 13-14 weeks old. Accompany your kitten outside, allowing it to explore the new environment, until it can find its way back to the house. It is best not to leave your kitten outside alone until it is six months old and has been neutered. Cats like to come and go as they please, so you may want to fit a cat flap.

Cat collars

When your kitten is older (over six months) you may want to fit a collar for identification or so it can activate an electronic cat flap. Check the collar's fit – you should be able to get one or two fingers underneath. 'Snap open' collars reduce the likelihood of accidents.

Hazards in the home

Kittens are inquisitive. Should yours go missing, look in cupboards, wardrobes and outside sheds. Keep the washing machine and tumble dryer doors shut when not in use. Remove any poisonous plants and store chemicals safely – see our leaflet *Hidden dangers for cats*.

Entertainment

Give your kitten an assortment of toys and a scratching post to keep it occupied and exercised. Play is a good way for you to get to know each other.

Grooming

Accustom your kitten to being groomed from an early age, particularly if it has a long coat. A longhaired cat needs daily attention to keep fur free of tangles.

Vaccinations

To provide protection against potentially fatal infections such as feline influenza, kittens need to be vaccinated. The first injection is given at eight to nine weeks old and a second at about 12 weeks. Your kitten should be kept away from other cats and stay indoors for 10 days after the second injection to ensure maximum protection. Adult cats require regular boosters.

Worming

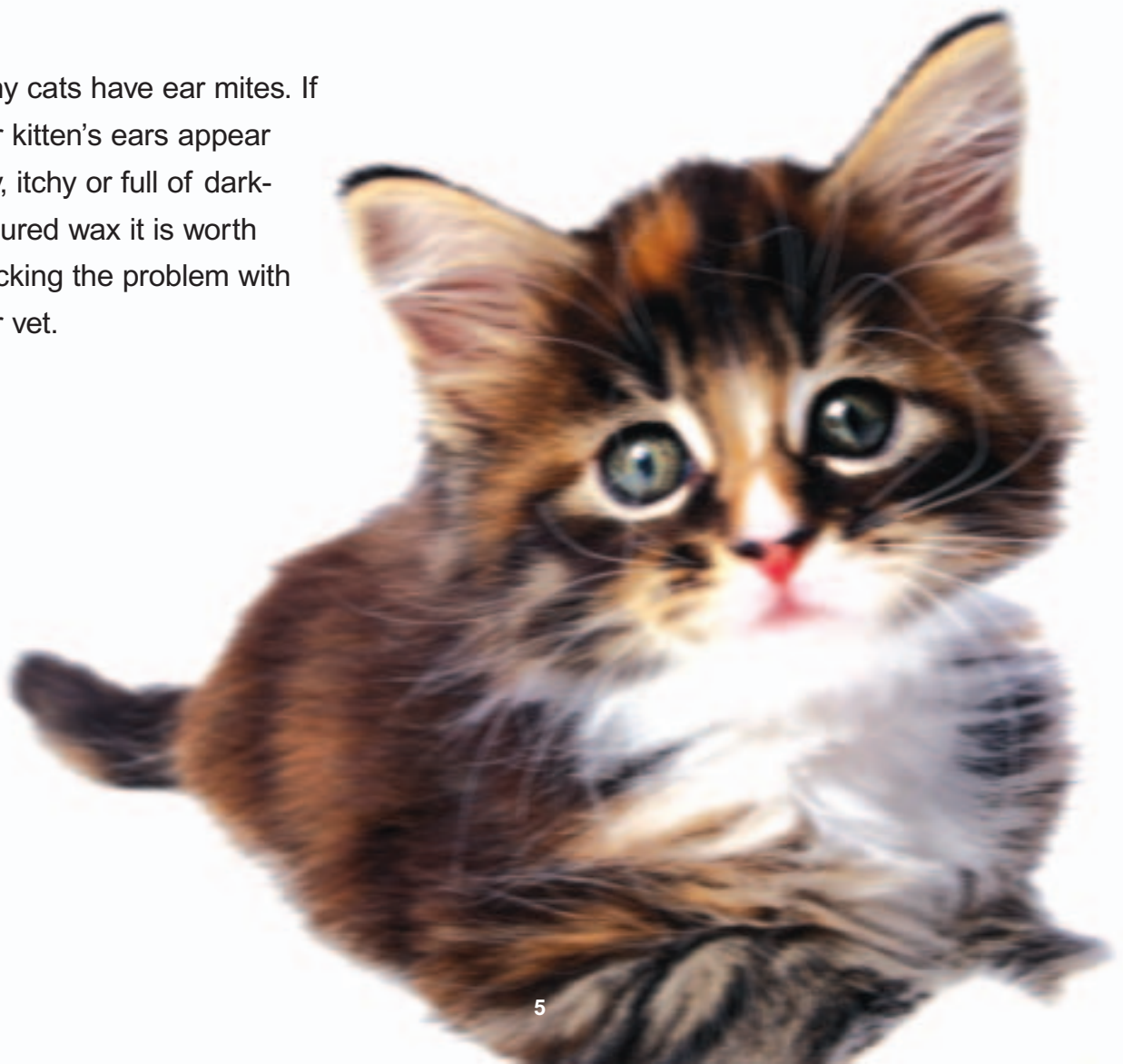
Kittens should be treated against roundworms at four to six weeks and then every two to three weeks until they are four months old. After this they should be treated for roundworms and tapeworms every two to six months depending on how much they hunt and if they have fleas. Use a proprietary wormer available from your vet.

Fleas

Even clean cats pick up fleas so check for these while grooming. For effective control, adult fleas on the kitten must be killed and re-infestation from the environment prevented. Traditional flea preparations can contain substances that are toxic to kittens, so only use products recommended by your vet.

Ear mites

Many cats have ear mites. If your kitten's ears appear dirty, itchy or full of dark-coloured wax it is worth checking the problem with your vet.



Neutering

Each year many unwanted cats and kittens have to be put to sleep or are left to fend for themselves because there are not enough homes to go around. Asking your vet to neuter your cat ensures that you do not contribute to this problem. A male cat can be castrated and a female kitten can be spayed from four to five months of age.

Microchipping

Microchipping is one of the most reliable ways of ensuring lost pets are reunited with their owners. It is a requirement if you intend to take advantage of the Pet Travel Scheme and travel abroad with your cat.

Further information

For further information and advice on caring for your pet or horse visit www.allaboutpets.org.uk, the national pet care information service. Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below to request a list of available leaflets.

All About Pets is provided by The Blue Cross, Britain's pet charity. We rely entirely on your support to enable us to continue our vital work. Any contribution would be most welcome. Thank you.



All About Pets, The Blue Cross
FREEPOST NAT4336, BURFORD OX18 4BR
www.allaboutpets.org.uk

Registered charity no: 224392