

# Kitten Preparation

Congratulations on the adoption of your new family member! I'm so thrilled to be able to share the love of a Ragdoll with others. I hear so many stories from new owners about how much everyone loves the kitten, and even have visitors just to see him/her! I promise that you too will fall in love with the breed.

To ensure the happiness and strengthen the bond between you and your new kitten I've put together a collaboration of articles from the American Association of Feline Practitioners, the Cornell University Feline Health Center, and a few other trusted sources. These articles have a lot of great information and will improve the relationship you develop with your kitten as well as help with your kitten's overall health.

## Part 1

### What You Will Need at Home

Before bringing your new kitten home, make sure that you already have the basic provisions it will need, including its own food and water dish, litter box, food, and ideally, a scratching post. It is recommended to use ceramic or stainless steel dishes. Plastic dishes hold oils and bacteria which can cause feline acne (looks like little black spots on the chin that can become infected). Wash the dishes routinely.

#### Litter Box

Your kitten must have access to a litter box. Cats are naturally fastidious, and most will instinctively use a litter box. The litter box can be simple or extravagant, but most cats prefer simple boxes without hoods. Keep in mind that kittens and elderly cats suffering from arthritis may need a box with sides that are low enough for them to enter easily. That being said, not all cats squat to urinate and may go over the edge of a low-sided box. Most, but not all, cats prefer unscented, scoopable litter. I personally use the Fresh Step scoopable. It is scented and because your kitten is already accustomed to using it you shouldn't have an issue using a scented litter at home.

Keep in mind that kittens are like children and often do not realize they need to potty until it's an immediate need. Keep kittens in a small area where a litter box can be quickly accessed.

Litter box rules:

- Be sure to keep the litter box clean and to change the litter frequently. Cats may avoid a litter-box area that isn't clean.
- Provide as many boxes as you have cats, plus one.
- There should be a litter box on every floor of your home.
- If you only have a one-level home or apartment, be sure to offer two *separate* litter box areas.
- Throw away and replace litter boxes every 1-2 years depending on how heavily they are used. Plastic, even if cleaned routinely, traps odors that can be offensive to your cat.
- Litter boxes should be 1.5 times the length of your cat.

### Scratching Post

Scratching on objects is a normal marking behavior for cats, and most cats can be taught to use scratching posts. Even declawed cats will still mark with their feet and enjoy the texture of scratching posts. Once you've figured out your cat's preferred scratching materials and orientation, you'll be better equipped to buy a suitable scratching substitute. For example, if your cat likes to scratch on furniture, a vertical scratching post might be a good choice. A cat that likes the horizontal motion of scratching on a floor carpet may prefer a flattened cardboard box or a log placed on its side. A cat that scratches on drapes may prefer a vertical post tall enough for a long stretch, such as those that mount on a wall or door. Take your cat to the new scratching area or object that you've approved, and reward him or her with treats, strokes, and praise for using it. Catnip will make it even more appealing!

### Carrier

A carrier is an essential item for safely transporting your kitty. Providing good health care, especially preventive health care, can allow your cats to have longer, more comfortable lives. However, this cannot happen unless they see the veterinarian for needed care. Many cats dislike going to the veterinarian, and that starts with the difficulty of getting the cat into the carrier. If we can make this step easier, the entire veterinary visit is usually much less stressful. Finding the right carrier and teaching your cat to love the carrier are easier than you might think.

#### *What Type of Carriers are Best?*

The best carriers are inexpensive hard-sided carriers that open from front, and can also be taken apart in the middle. An easily removable top allows a cat which is fearful, anxious or in

pain to stay in the bottom half of the carrier for exams. Your veterinarian can often do the exam in the bottom of a well-designed carrier. Avoid carriers that require a cat to be pulled from or dumped out for an exam. Choose carriers that are sturdy, secure and stable for the cat, as well as easy for you to carry. The Center for Pet Safety recommends that the carrier be belted into the backseat only if they have been crash tested. All others should be placed on the floor of the backseat. Some cats like to see out, whereas others are less anxious when the carrier is covered with a blanket or towel to prevent seeing the unfamiliar.

### *Understanding your Cat's Behavior*

- Cats are most comfortable with the familiar, and need time to adjust to the unfamiliar. The visit to the veterinarian is often difficult because the carrier, car, and the veterinary hospital are usually unfamiliar. Respect your cat's need for time to become familiar with new situations, people and places.
- Stay calm. Cats can sense our anxiety or frustrations, which may cause them to become fearful or anxious.
- Cats do not learn from punishment or force. Give rewards to encourage positive behavior. For example, if your cat is sitting calmly in or near a carrier, give a treat. Likewise, rewards can be given to help your cat become familiar with the type of handling that may be encountered at the veterinarian (e.g., handling paws, ears and mouth). A treat is what is highly desirable to your cat, which may be in the form of food, play or affection. Be persistent and reward every time.

### *Helping Your Cat Become Comfortable with the Carrier*

The goal is for your cat to learn to associate the carrier with positive experiences and routinely enter voluntarily.

- Make the carrier a familiar place at home by leaving it in a room where your cat spends a lot of time. Leave the carrier open and assessable at all times.
- Place familiar soft bedding inside the carrier. Bedding or clothing with your scent can make them feel more secure.
- Place treats, catnip, or toys inside the carrier to encourage the cat to enter at home. Often, you will first see that treats are removed from the carrier during the night.
- It may take days or weeks before your cat starts to trust the carrier. Remain calm, patient and reward desired behaviors.
- If you still have trouble, you may need to assess the carrier itself.

### *Getting an Unwilling Cat into the Carrier*

If your cat needs to go to the veterinarian right away, and is not yet accustomed to the carrier, the following may help:

- Start by putting the carrier in a small room with few hiding places. Bring the cat into the room and close the door. Move slowly and calmly. Do not chase the cat to get it into the carrier. Encourage the cat with treats or toys to walk into the carrier.
- If your cat will not walk into the carrier, and your carrier has an opening on the top, gently cradle your cat and lower it into the carrier. Another option is to remove the top half of your carrier while getting the cat to go into the bottom half, and then calmly replace the top.
- Use familiar bedding inside the carrier. Consider use of synthetic feline facial pheromone (Feliway®) analog spray in the carrier at least 30 minutes prior to transport to help calm the cat.

### *Coming Home – Keeping the Peace in a Multi-cat Household*

Cats are very sensitive to smells, and unfamiliar smells can result in one cat no longer recognizing another. Aggressive behavior can occur when one cat senses another as a stranger. These suggestions can help avoid problems between cats following a veterinary visit:

- Leave the returning cat in the carrier for a few minutes to see how all of your cats react.
- If all cats appear calm and peaceful, let the returning cat out of the carrier.
- If you sense tension between the cats, or if previous home-comings have resulted in conflict, keep the cat in the carrier and take it to a separate room to avoid potential injury from an upset cat. Once all cats appear calm open the door and allow the cats to interact on their own time, but under supervision.
- If necessary provide food, water and litter box for a minimum of 24 hours while it regains the more familiar smell of home. If there is still stress after this time, contact your veterinarian for more advice on slower introduction or medication to help the process.
- A synthetic feline pheromone (Feliway®) can help provide the sense of familiarity.
- For future visits: – Use familiar bedding or clothing with your scent, as it retains the smell of home and helps with reintroduction. – Use a synthetic feline pheromone (Feliway®).