



## Visit Two: Comprehensive Home Care

Clermont Animal Hospital, Inc.

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## Training your Kitten

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*Many people do not make a conscious effort to train a cat as they would a dog. However, cats can be trained (some more easily than others) to behave as you want them to, to come when called and to accept treatment. A well-trained cat is more easily treated when sick or injured and is a much better member of your family. Information in this section will help you train your cat. Please refer to the last handout for information on litter box training.*

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### Training your Kitten to be Comfortable with Examination

It is important to examine your cat at least once a week for any signs or illness or injury. When starting with a young kitten, make this part of your daily routine. By examining your pet everyday, he or she learns that this is just part of life.

Below are some tips to get your kitten used to being examined:

- Do not give up if your pet wiggles or tries to get away. Be firm but gentle.
- When your kitten stands still and allows you to examine him or her, give plenty of praise.
- Give a treat at the very end of the examination.
- Start out slowly, with just a quick examination:
  - Look in the ears.
  - Lift the lips.
  - Run your hands over his or her body.
- As your kitten becomes accustomed to being examined, perform a more thorough examination:
  - Look in the eyes for any signs of redness or discharge.
  - Examine the ears for any sign of wax or odor.
  - Open the mouth and look at the teeth and gums for signs of tartar and gingivitis.
  - Rub your fingers along the gums so that your cat starts to get used to dental care.
  - Feel the abdomen for any masses or signs of discomfort.
  - Run your hands over all parts of the body feeling for lumps or signs of injury.
  - Look for any signs of fleas or dry skin.
  - Pick up each foot and examine the pads and nails (this helps prepare your cat for toenail trims).
- Each time you examine your kitten, follow the same routine. This makes acceptance easier and quicker, and it allows you to perform a quick thorough examination.

Routine examinations at home will help you identify any medical problems early, when they are easiest to treat. It will also decrease the stress of veterinary visits, as your pet will be used to being examined. It will also make it easier for you to examine injuries and other problems when they occur.

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### Training your Kitten to Accept Restraint

There will be times in your cat's life when it will be necessary to restrain your kitten for examination or treatment. Some cats are very tolerant of restraint, while others resist and fight it. You should restrain your cat frequently in the two common restraint positions so that your cat learns to tolerate this and accepts it. There are two types of restraining positions, which are described below.

**Common restraining positions:**

- The most common restraint needed is the “scruff.” This is the most natural form of restraint in cats, as it is used by the mother cat to carry or restrain her kittens.
  - With your cat standing or sitting, grab a handful of skin at the back of the neck.
  - Place your other arm along the length of the cat’s body, and pull him or her close against you.
- For some treatments or examinations, your cat will need to be on his or her side. To properly restrain your cat in this manner:
  - Get your cat to lie on his or her side with the back toward you and the legs out away from you.
  - Scruff your cat as described above, and place the forearm of your same hand along the cat’s back.
  - Hold the down (lower) back leg in your other hand.
  - Stretch your cat out gently so that he or she cannot get the leverage needed to sit up.

Put your kitten in both of these restraints on a routine basis. Hold him or her until he or she relaxes, then give plenty of praise and set him or her free. Once your cat learns to relax while restrained, gradually increase the amount of time of restraint. Start out with about 10 seconds and work up to two minutes. During this time, talk soothingly and reassure your cat. These exercises will make it much easier for you to treat your cat at home and will make vet visits much less stressful.

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**Training your Kitten not to Claw**

Some kittens will extend their claws during play or use them to scratch at furniture. If your cat is using his or her claws in an inappropriate manner, it is important to address the situation as early as possible.

First it is necessary to provide your cat with an appropriate place to use his or her claws (such as a scratching post). Whenever your cat is clawing at furniture, legs, etc., move your cat to the scratching post and encourage scratching on the post. If your cat doesn’t convert to using the scratching post with this gentle redirection, consider the following suggestions:

1. Use a water gun or squirt bottle to spray your cat when you notice inappropriate clawing.
2. Make the scratching post more desirable by sprinkling catnip on it or putting your cat’s favorite toys or treats on it.
3. Spray the furniture your cat scratches with a repellent scent.
4. Try scratching posts made from different materials (carpet, rope, bark, etc.); choose a post that most closely matches the surfaces your cat scratches.
5. Cover the surfaces your cat scratches with plastic wrap or foil temporarily.
6. Place a plastic carpet protector upside down (nub side up) where your cat stands to scratch.
7. Confine your cat to a “safe” room with the scratching post until he or she uses it regularly.



## Nutrition and Weight Control

Clermont Animal Hospital, Inc.

### Food Choice and Vitamins

#### What type of food should I feed my kitten and/or cat?

- Until your kitten is a year old, he or she should be eating a **kitten formula food**. Other life-stage food formulas do not provide the proper balance of calories and nutrients needed for a growing cat.
- As a general rule, you should switch to an **adult formula diet** around your kitten's first birthday.
- Once your cat is seven years old, a **senior formula cat food** is recommended.
- **Pregnant and nursing cats** should be fed kitten formula food.

#### What brand of food should I buy?

Because your cat's food must provide for all of his or her nutritional needs and energy requirements, it is important to buy the highest quality food that you can afford to feed him or her. Clermont Animal Hospital, Inc. recommends Hill's Science Diet®, Iams® and Purina® products, but there are many other quality foods on the market.

When choosing a brand of food, be sure to look for the AAFCO (American Association of Feed Control Officials) approval label on the bag to insure that the food meets all nutritional standards. If you would like further information on choosing a diet, our staff will be happy to help you.

#### Is it okay to change brands of foods?

It is important to choose one brand and type of food rather than randomly buying whatever is on sale or most convenient. This is because changing foods can upset your cat's stomach and intestines.

Any time you decide to introduce a new food to your cat, be sure to reserve some of the old food for a transition period. Mix the new food in gradually, increasing the amount of new food and decreasing the amount of old food each day. Most cats will tolerate new foods well with a four to five day transition period.

Watch your cat carefully for any signs of intolerance during the transition (decreased appetite, diarrhea, etc.). If you notice these signs, slow down the rate at which you are introducing the new food and lengthen the transition period to seven - 14 days.

#### Do I need to give my kitten vitamins?

Most commercial kitten foods provide all of the vitamins and minerals your cat needs; however, a vitamin supplement is a good way to ensure that your growing cat meets all of his or her nutritional requirements. This is particularly important if your cat is a finicky eater, during periods of illness, or if more than 10 percent of your cat's diet is something other than commercial kitten food. Clermont Animal Hospital provides several types of vitamins here for your convenience. These are very tasty and make good treats for your kitten. The Felovite® supplement is also good for preventing and treating low blood sugar in young kittens.

### **Can I feed my cat “people food” and treats?**

In general, it is not a good idea to feed your cat “people food.” Humans and cats have different nutritional and energy requirements, making it difficult to provide a balanced diet that incorporates a large portion of “people food.”

Even using human food for treats is not a good idea. Once a kitten learns to expect handouts, begging and occasionally food snatching becomes a problem. Also, human foods are often high calorie treats, which can contribute to obesity.

In addition, many human foods can cause health problems in cats:

1. Because 50 percent of cats are lactose intolerant and will develop diarrhea if fed certain dairy products, it is a good idea to watch for this reaction in your cat and avoid dairy products if it occurs.
2. Never feed ham, pork or other fatty meats to your cat—these can lead to pancreatitis
3. Many rich foods lead to diarrhea, vomiting, or upset stomach.

If you can’t resist the urge to give your cat occasional “people food,” it is important to keep a few things in mind:

1. Your cat’s diet should be at least 90 percent kitten/cat food. All human food, cat treats, and other supplements should make up 10 percent or less of the total calorie intake. If this is not the case, your cat may not be meeting all of his or her nutritional requirements.
2. Feed human food in small portions. A bite-sized portion for you would be an entire meal for a small kitten. Keep your cat’s body size in mind when you’re doling out the treats.
3. Never feed your cat directly from your plate. This encourages mealtime begging.
4. Introduce only one new food item at a time and watch for any sign of upset stomach following this. If a certain food causes a bad affect, avoid this food item in the future.

Treats produced and marketed specifically for cats are preferable to human food. Larger treats can be broken into bite-sized pieces for training and extra enjoyment. You will find that your cat will be more content with smaller treats given more frequently than with larger treats given less often. If you’re cat is on a special diet, reserving a few kibbles to give as treats is often enough to satisfy your cat’s treat cravings.

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### **Weight Control**

Keeping your cat in the ideal weight range is probably the best thing you can do for his or her health. Overweight cats are much more likely than trim cats to develop a variety of problems including arthritis/joint problems and diabetes. While these are usually problems of older animals, good dietary habits must start in kittens.

#### **How much should I feed my cat?**

The most important aspect of weight control is the amount of food you feed your cat. If at least 90 percent of your cat’s caloric intake comes from kitten/cat food, the feeding guidelines on the food bag are a good starting point in determining how much to feed your cat. Keep in mind that these guidelines are tailored to the needs of the average healthy cat. Once your kitten is spayed or neutered, his or her caloric requirements will probably decrease by 25 - 35 percent. It is also important to realize that if your cat is very athletic and energetic or a total couch potato, you may need to adjust the amount of food you provide.

### **How often should I feed my cat?**

Be sure to split the total daily allotment into smaller meals. As a general rule:

- Most kittens under 4 months old should be fed at least three times a day.
- Kittens 4 - 12 months old should be fed at least twice a day.
- Adult cats can be fed one to two times, a day depending on owner preference.

When eliminating a feeding time, decrease the amount of food fed at that meal gradually over a five to seven day period to help ease the transition. Free-choice feeding (having food available all the time) is an alternative, as long as you are careful not to put out more food in a day than your cat should be eating.

In addition to controlling the amount of cat food fed, limiting calorie intake from treats and encouraging an adequate exercise program are also important in maintaining ideal weight and body condition.

### **Using body condition to determine if your cat is eating the right amount**

Weight varies greatly among breeds and with body structure. Body condition is a much more accurate way to determine if your cat is eating the right amount. Cats that are in ideal body condition have a clearly defined, tucked waist. If you run your hands over the rib cage of these cats, you should be able to easily count every rib, but you should not be able to see the ribs looking at the cat.

If your cat is starting to lose his or her waist and developing a fat pad making it more difficult to feel the ribs, then it is time to decrease his or her caloric intake. This can be done by decreasing the amount fed or switching to a lower calorie diet (most pet food brands have a light or weight control formula).

If you can ever see your cat's ribs, then you are not meeting your cat's energy needs and should increase the amount you are feeding your cat. Monitor your cat's body condition throughout his or her life, and adjust the number of calories you are feeding as is necessary to maintain ideal body condition.



## Grooming and Bathing

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### Brushing and Coat Care

Most shorthaired kittens will groom themselves and will not require brushing. Most longhaired cats require brushing to prevent their coat from becoming matted. It is important to introduce your kitten to grooming at an early age. Below are some tips to help your kitten get used to brushed:

- For young kittens, choose a soft brush and incorporate brushing with petting your cat at least several times a week.
  - Allow your kitten to sniff and lick the brush, then gently and softly brush his or her coat. As he or she becomes accustomed to being brushed, you can make firmer brush strokes.
  - Be sure to talk quietly and reassure your kitten while brushing.
  - Give plenty of praise for acceptance, and a treat at the end of the grooming session.
  - After your kitten is comfortable with a soft brush, gradually switch to whichever brush type you prefer. The type of brush you choose will depend on coat thickness, length and personal preference.
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### Bathing your Kitten

#### How often should I bathe my kitten?

Most cats do not need to be bathed on a regular basis because they lick themselves clean while grooming. If shampoos are used too frequently, they can cause a dry coat and flaky skin. For this reason Clermont Animal Hospital, Inc. recommends that you do not bathe your cat more frequently than once every month. Be sure to choose a shampoo that is designed for cats. If your cat needs to be bathed more frequently than once a month, our staff at Clermont Animal Hospital, Inc. can recommend special shampoos that will not dry his or her skin as much. Cats should not be bathed during cool weather unless they are thoroughly dried afterward.

#### What if someone in my household has allergies to cat dander?

If you or a member of your family has mild to moderate cat dander allergies, bathing your cat regularly with a special anti-dander shampoo (available through Clermont Animal Hospital, Inc.) may significantly lessen or eliminate allergic reactions.

#### How do I get my kitten used to bathing?

To help your kitten learn to accept bathing:

- Only bathe your kitten inside in a tub or sink with warm (not hot) water.
- Fill the sink with two to four inches of water and turn off the tap before bringing the kitten into the room.
- Allow your kitten to sit in the sink for a few minutes to adjust to it before starting the bathing process.
- Talk to him or her in a comforting tone and offer food or treats.
- If he or she tries to escape the tub, hold him or her firmly in place, but talk in reassuring and firm, but not angry, tones.
- Once he or she has had time to adjust to the sink, use a dipper or cup to gently pour water over your kitten's back while continuing to offer food. Be sure to avoid the face.
- Rub in the shampoo while continuing to use soothing words, and then rinse gently, again avoiding the face.
- If the face needs attention, do this with a sponge or soft cloth—most cats resent water in their face.
- Towel your cat dry gently, but firmly. If you are using a hair dryer to further dry your cat, be sure to set it on the coolest setting.



## Dental Health and Oral Care

Clermont Animal Hospital, Inc.

### Your Kitten's New Teeth

Once your cat's adult teeth start coming in, dental care becomes an important part of providing home health care for your cat. Kittens lose their baby teeth and get their new permanent adult teeth from 4 - 6 months of age:

- The first teeth to be lost at 4 – 4 ½ months are the incisors, which are the small teeth in the very front and center of your kitten's mouth. Most of the time you will not see these teeth fall out as they are often swallowed or lost in grass or carpeting. By 4 ½ months, your cat should have all of his or her adult incisors.
- The baby canine (pointy) teeth fall out between 5 and 5 ½ months. The adult canine will be completely grown in by 5 ½ - 6 months. During this time, your cat is getting several new teeth (premolars and molars) in the back of the mouth that are more difficult to see.

### Why is Dental Care Important?

Just as you need to brush your teeth everyday to prevent plaque and tartar buildup, your kitten's teeth need routine daily cleanings as well. **Plaque** is a soft, sticky substance made up of food debris, saliva and bacteria that can be removed easily by brushing. However, once plaque remains on the teeth for more than 24 hours, it starts to harden into a chalky, mineralized substance called **tartar** (this is the same process that occurs in humans).

As tartar builds up, it leads to a problem called **periodontal disease**. Unlike cavities in humans, this does not affect the tooth itself. Instead it causes inflammation of the gums (**gingivitis**) and a breakdown of the structures securing the tooth (which leads to tooth loss). As periodontal disease progresses, it can cause pain, decreased appetite and irritability.

Because tartar and plaque contain huge numbers of bacteria, they can lead to more serious systemic infections including:

- Endocarditis (infection of the heart valves)
- Hepatitis (infection of the liver)
- Nephritis (infection of the kidney)

If that is not enough to get you to brush your cat's teeth, consider this: 95 percent of "bad breath" in cats is caused by periodontal disease. If you cuddle or sleep with your cat, bad breath is the last thing you want your cat to develop!

### Do I need to brush my cat's teeth every day?

Plaque and tartar accumulate on a daily basis. Occasional brushings are not enough. While brushing your kitten's teeth once or twice a week may be better than nothing, it will not stop plaque and tartar buildup.

Daily teeth brushing are one of the best things you can do for your cat's general health and well being. Not only will it reduce the incidence of all of the problems described above, it will also decrease the frequency of professional dental cleanings. These require full anesthesia, which always carries a small risk to your pet and can become costly if frequent cleanings are necessary.



## **Brushing your Cat's Teeth**

It is important for you and your kitten to develop a dental care routine that both of you can at least tolerate, if not enjoy. This is a routine you want to establish for the rest of your pet's life, so don't rush the acclimation process. If your kitten is not comfortable with oral care, he or she will fight you or try to get away, making it impossible to clean his or her teeth.

To train your cat to accept oral care, it is best to follow a step-by-step program of gradual progression, as described below. Do not move on to the next step until both you and your cat are comfortable with the step before it. Be sure to give plenty of reassuring words, praise, and treats to make it a relaxed and enjoyable process for both of you. Also, remember to keep safety first. If at any time your cat shows aggression, growls or tries to bite, stop immediately and contact our hospital or your professional cat trainer for advice.

1. Start by gently playing with your cat's mouth. Start out by doing this for only 20-30 seconds at a time, and gradually increase the time until your kitten will allow you to do this for two minutes with no resistance.
  - a. Gently lift the gums and look at the teeth.
  - b. Rub your index finger along the outer surfaces of all teeth and gums.
  - c. Gently open your cat's mouth and examine the inner surfaces of all of the teeth. Look for any abnormalities including tartar buildup, gum redness/inflammation, and sores or masses.
  - d. If your kitten allows this without a fuss give plenty of praise.
  - e. If he or she tries to toss his or her head and squirm, continue to gently play with the mouth while talking soothingly. Once your kitten relaxes, give praise and stop.
2. If your kitten is laid back, you may be able to clean the inner surfaces of the teeth as well. Once he or she is used to you playing with the mouth, try holding the mouth open and rubbing your fingers along the inner surfaces of the teeth and gums.

Do not attempt this if your cat is struggling with you at all. The inner surfaces do not accumulate tartar nearly as quickly as the outer surfaces, and it is not worth getting bit trying to clean them or alienating your cat to dental care in the process.

3. As soon as your kitten accepts you playing with his or her mouth without a fuss, start using a cotton ball or soft gauze moistened with warm water to gently wipe the outsides of all teeth. As your cat begins to accept this, gradually increase the amount of time until you reach two minutes.
4. Once your cat tolerates the cotton ball or gauze well, it is time to introduce the toothpaste. Be sure to only use toothpaste designed specifically for cats (available through Clermont Animal Hospital, Inc.). Human toothpaste creates too much foam, does not have a taste that appeals to cats and can cause vomiting. We can provide you with a sample of toothpaste to use at this stage in the process. Put a small amount of toothpaste (pea-sized portion) on the cotton ball or gauze and rub the surfaces of your cat's teeth and gums as before.
5. The final phase in training is to introduce the actual brush. It is usually best to start with a finger brush, a plastic soft-bristled brush that slips over your finger. These brushes are available through Clermont Animal Hospital, Inc. as well.

- a. Use this brush in a back-and-forth motion along the outer surfaces of the teeth and gums. (Do not attempt to clean the inner surfaces unless you are confident that your cat will tolerate this without a struggle).
- b. Be sure to use the brush to gently massage the gums in addition to brushing the teeth, themselves.
- c. Start out brushing for only 20 - 30 seconds at a time and gradually increase to two to three minutes.
- d. Once your cat is used to the finger brush, you may either continue with this brush or switch to a soft-bristled brush with a handle and repeat step 5 using this brush (be sure to choose a brush specifically designed for cats).

Be sure to go through the above steps slowly with your cat. By allowing your cat to gradually adjust to oral care, you will make it a positive experience. Use plenty of praise and a small treat when your kitten allows you to care for his or her teeth.

### **When should I brush my kitten's teeth?**

While we routinely brush our teeth after eating, it may be helpful to spend several minutes BEFORE feeding your kitten to perform your dental care routine. This is because it will help you make dental care a part of your daily routine by creating a consistent time for doing it. Providing the meal immediately following your dental routine will also create positive reinforcement for good behavior. Your pet will learn that if he or she relaxes and allows you to brush his or her teeth, he or she will get to eat sooner.

## **Professional Dental Cleanings**

Despite your best efforts to keep your cat's teeth clean, almost all cats will need a professional cleaning at some point. While some cats, like humans, need professional cleanings as often as twice a year, most cats only require cleanings every 1 - 3 years. As part of all routine health checks at Clermont Animal Hospital, our doctors will evaluate the teeth and gums and make recommendations for professional cleanings when necessary.

### **How do I know when my cat needs a professional cleaning?**

Since we only check healthy cats once or twice a year, it is important for you to monitor the teeth and gums at home between visits. If you notice any of the signs below, you should set up an appointment for a dental evaluation. We can then schedule a professional cleaning.

1. **Tartar buildup on teeth**—Tartar is a tan or grey chalky material that cakes teeth, particularly along the gum line. If the teeth are just slightly discolored from the tartar, a professional cleaning is probably not necessary, but once buildup begins it is important to have the teeth cleaned.
2. **Gingivitis**—Gingivitis is inflammation of the gums. It typically appears as a reddened area of gum right next to the tooth. It usually occurs in association with tartar buildup, but it can occur by itself.

**Once gingivitis is seen, it is important to take action.** This is a sign that there is damage to the attachment between the tooth and gum. If gingivitis continues unchecked, this damage can become permanent and irreversible leading to periodontal disease (loss of bone), causing root exposure and tooth loss. If you notice red or inflamed gums, do not put off evaluation.

3. **Chipped, broken, or fractured teeth**—Cats of any age can break a tooth by chewing things like rocks, hard toys or metal. Traumatic injuries can occur if your cat is hit in the mouth. While broken teeth may not appear to be causing a problem, they should always

be evaluated and probed by one of our doctors. If the root is exposed, it can allow an infection to develop weeks or even months after the initial injury, creating a large and painful abscess. Root exposure can also be quite painful even if an abscess does not develop.

4. **Bad breath**—As mentioned before, almost all cases of bad breath are due to periodontal (dental) disease. If your cat has bad breath, it is probably time for a professional cleaning.
5. **Loose teeth/teeth with root exposure**—If you notice teeth that are loose or teeth with gum recession (gums pulled back) and root exposure, you have waited too long to prevent irreversible damage. This doesn't mean we can't help your cat, however.

**Don't delay! Set up an appointment for evaluation.** Even if your cat is not showing signs of pain or discomfort, he or she is probably experiencing it. We will probably need to extract all loose teeth. Teeth with root exposure may or may not require extraction.

#### **What happens during a professional cleaning?**

All professional dental cleanings require anesthesia. For this reason, we recommend pre-dental blood screenings to make sure that your pet doesn't have any liver, kidney or electrolyte issues and is not showing any signs of systemic infection related to the tartar buildup. With every dental cleaning, we:

- Use an ultrasonic cleaner to remove all plaque and tartar.
- Check the depth of any areas where the gum has started to detach from the tooth, and determine if the tooth needs to be extracted or if we can perform a root plane procedure to potentially save the tooth.
- Polish all teeth using a fluoride polish to decrease future plaque accumulation.

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