

## **Article: New Kitty Seminar**

by Diane Novak

Congratulations on deciding to adopt a new pet. We've put this "tutorial" together for folks who haven't been "Owned" by a cat before or haven't in several years.

This is just a "primer" and we really support you in doing your own research in the library and on the Internet as well.

### **WHAT YOU WILL NEED:**

**A Veterinarian:** Ask your friends whom they like. Prices will range from vet to vet, but a personal recommendation is always best.

**A Book on Cat Care:** It's a good idea to have a reliable resource on hand should you have a question or sudden emergency.

**Cat Carrier:** A carrier is necessary for safe and comfortable trips to the vet. Buy one large enough if you have a kitten as kittens grow to full-size in a year. Inside the box, cut a piece of carpet or bath mat with a rubber backing that won't slide and will give kitty something to grip onto during trips.

**Litter Boxes:** We recommend using a box large enough so your kitten can use it when it's bigger as well. You may need to have a smaller box to start off with if your kitten can't climb over the rim however. Cornell advises using 1box per cat OR three boxes per two cats. This will mean getting creative about space if you live in an apartment, but some cats like their own personal boxes. More on litter boxes in subsequent information.

**YOUR PET'S ADJUSTMENT TIME:** We recommend bringing your new pet home on a day where you know you'll be able to spend lots of time with him. RESIST the temptation to let your new pet roam the house. Cats like cozy small places when being re-adjusted to a new place. There's a lot to learn including new family members, other pets, as well as all the rooms. This animal may have had several foster settings before coming to your house, so take it slow. We suggest confinement to a small room with water; food and litter box all in one place for a few days. Hang out with your new friend in that one room, but be cognizant that cats will need to have their own "space" too. Cats sleep several hours a day, but like company. Within a few days you can allow it to explore more of the house. Best idea is to ask the foster home how they think the new kitten/cat will react with lots of room to explore.

**ALLOWING SUNLIGHT IN:** When your cat or kitten will be indoors, it's VERY important to allow sunlight into the home. The sun is nurturing to all living beings. The absence of sun will cause fur to shed, scratching, and vitamin deficiencies. Also, animals can get depressed LIKE HUMANS without natural sunlight. Raise blinds, shades and open windows to let the fresh air in. Even if it's a cold day, a bit of fresh air is good.

**HOLDING AND LIFTING YOUR NEW CAT:** Some animals are not too keen on being lifted from their position of the floor all the way up to your height. This can make certain animals feel insecure and they may fidget to get down or meow in fear. Don't push it if you sense they're upset. Put them down. Sometimes an adult cat has an unknown history that may include this particular fear. It's best to start at their level on the floor. Then if they seem comfortable, bring them to your lap. Eventually the cat may enjoy being lifted, but forcing the issue will not make the animal bond with you.

**MY SLOGAN:** ALWAYS GO AT THE ANIMAL'S PACE & REMEMBER TO LET IT HAVE ITS' SPACE.

**CAT FURNITURE:** Young cats love kitty condos and cat trees. These pieces are helpful when needing an appropriate place to scratch. \*See more under declawing. I notice my older cats are happy with their window perch or hanging out on the couch or bed.

**CAT TOYS:** Mature cats may not be into chasing balls or string but get a kick out of a toy called the "cat dancer" which is a feather attached to a wire handle. Kittens are easy to appease and will be happy chasing a dust ball. There are track toys with that have balls that roll along a track and a scratching area to exercise nails on in the center. My adult cats enjoy watching the ball go round and round. There are toys that attach to a door and cheap ping-pong balls are always a favorite. A WORD OF CAUTION: Be extra careful with leaving yarn and other types of string around little kittens when you're not home to supervise. They can get caught, panic and choke themselves. They have also been known to swallow string which can cause great harm.

**SAFETY AND YOUR CAT:** Sometimes innocent things can cause big problems for our naturally curious feline friends.

- 1) Remove string items when you're not in the same room.
- 2) Check to see where your cat or kitten is when you open the fridge door. I had a little kitten jump into the bottom shelf because it smelled so good in there.
- 3) Check dryers before you close the doors.
- 4) Ovens. It may seem like a no-brainer, but the scariest near CATastrophe I ever had involved my own cat when he jumped into the broiler unbeknownst to me.

**COLLAR SAFETY:** Indoor cats do not normally wear collars. If you **MUST** have one on an outside cat, **PLEASE** only use the expanding or breakaway type so he/she can easily get out of the collar if accidentally caught on a fence or tree. We heard of an inside kitten that did not have a break away collar on and was unfortunately hung on a piece of furniture. This information is not to horrify you but to make you an educated cat/kitten mom or dad.

**DIETARY NEEDS:** First and foremost always have water available for your pets. If you give a diet of mostly dry food this is especially important. Get your cat or kitten started on the best food you can afford. What you feed it now will determine its health in years to come. Look for foods with the lowest magnesium count. It's listed on the ingredient label. Low magnesium keeps the urinary tract healthy and prevents FUS (Feline Urinary Syndrome) Speak to your Veterinarian about this as well as reading about FUS, but to be on the safe side, avoid supermarket brand foods which are typically less quality than brand names and I suggest that people avoid any **FISH FLAVORED FOODS** as they have a tendency to have a higher magnesium count.

**Dry vs. Canned Foods:** I take the middle ground and give my animals both. Your vet will be the best person to ask about this however. Sometimes you do all the right things, but if your cat or kitten has a proclivity towards FUS, it'll happen anyway.

## **WARNING SIGNS**

The Following is a List of **WARNING SIGNS** that your cat needs to be seen by a Veterinarian ASAP.

1. The cat squats and urinates in places other than its box.
2. The cat is becoming increasingly irritable. If it's FUS (Feline Urological Syndrome) your kitty will be very uncomfortable.
3. Cat becomes withdrawn and/or cries when walking around.

When it comes to the issue of inappropriate urination, always take the precautionary stance and **ASSUME** a physical problem. When in pain, a cat has been known to avoid using the litter box as it associates the pain with urinating there. Unfortunately some cats **HAVE BEEN EUTHANIZED** because their owners thought they were hopelessly "dirty cats" with a behavior problem. Without the proper guidance from a skilled professional, owners will incorrectly assume a behavioral issue instead of a serious physical problem.

## **WHEN IT'S NOT A MEDICAL PROBLEM, BUT A BEHAVIORAL ONE:**

There are some times when cats do urinate out of the box and there is no medical reason for this. Ask yourself these questions:

- 1) Has there been a change in the house lately causing your cat stress?
- 2) Have you moved the box or changed the type of litter you always used?
- 3) Had a new baby?
- 4) Moved, added, or changed people to or from the home?
- 6) Have you reduced the attention you previously had given. Animals are sensitive creatures and may react negatively if upset by changes in the environment or feeling stressed.
- 7) Has your animal been declawed? While we may get some heat on this one, we have heard of too many cases where animals that have been declawed developed litter box issues. We are not sure why this is, but it is something to consider when figuring out the problem.

Always ask your Veterinarian for his/her advice first. Try adding another litter box to another part of the home. If after making whatever changes you can to accommodate the animal, the behavior hasn't changed, try calling The Cornell University. They have a free phone-in advice line. That toll-free number is 1-800-KITTYDR.