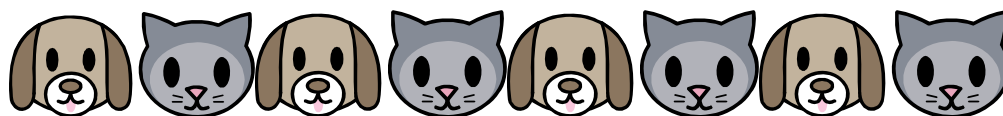


# CHOOSING A VETERINARIAN



Choosing a vet is a very personal and important decision. Choose a vet who you are comfortable with and who will answer your questions.

## **Check out the office**

Do animals seem just frightened or are they also out of control? Is it bedlam, or reasonable for the number of different animals there? Do you have local recommendations from friends?

Does the vet specialize in small animals as opposed to, say, livestock?

The best way to find a vet is word of mouth (from someone who takes good care of their pets, of course).

Ask your trusted former vet if she/he knows someone good in the new town. Often you'll get an excellent referral that way.

If there's a local humane society or shelter, see if there are vets who volunteer their time there. Many vets who care about animals are often trustees and/or volunteer their services.

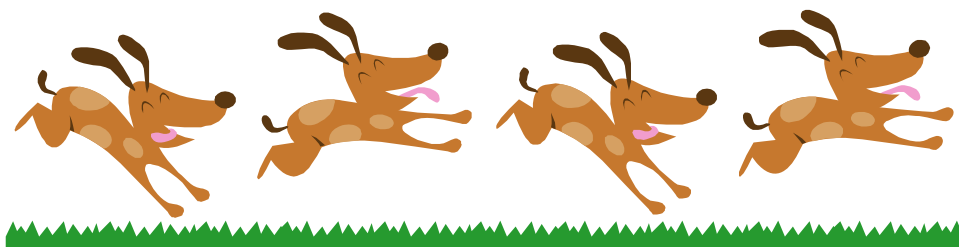
Check with any local breed associations: see who their members go to.

Look for memberships in associations like the American Animal Hospital Association (which has a fairly stiff inspection), Feline Practitioners Association, American Assoc. of Vet Cardiology, Animal Behavior Association, etc. These are usually people who have kept up with new developments.

## **24 hour Emergency Care**

Generally, a good vet will either be associated with a 24 emergency care plan or be able to give you the number of a good place in your area. Keep this number on your refrigerator and check with your vet when you visit that it's still up-to-date.

*Trips to the Vet Should Be Done Regularly.*



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## VET VISIT - WHAT TO EXPECT

### Fecal Samples

If your vet asks you for a fecal sample, put a small, fingernail-sized sample into a plastic bag, or ask your vet for a supply of fecal samplers. The vet cannot always get a fecal sample from the cat, and this saves you extra trips to return the sample and then bring the cat in if the tests are positive. If you are afraid your cat will not cooperate and give you a fresh sample before you need to go in, within 18-12 hours a sample can be placed in the refrigerator. Samples over 18 hours hold, however, will probably not be of use.

### Cat Reactions

Cats largely dislike being taken to the vet. They hate riding in the car most of all, and the smell of fear and other animals in the office often distresses them further. Get a pet carrier. A plain cardboard one will do for infrequent trips; get a stronger fiberglass one for more travel or destructive cats. If you plan on having your pet travel with you via airlines, you will need a soft-sided carrier to bring your pet aboard the aircraft with you. Carriers keep your cat under control at the vet's and prevent accidents in the car en route.

### Vet bills

You should be prepared to handle routine costs from year to year incurred by yearly physical exams, occasional fecal samples (and worming medication), plus yearly vaccinations. However, accidents and major illnesses can happen. Sometimes, pet health care insurance is one way people use to control these costs. Other times you might try vet schools which may give you reduced rates for their students to have the opportunity to work with your cat, especially if the problem is rare or uncommon.

### Payment

You might be able to negotiate a monthly payment toward a large bill, or a slightly reduced one in exchange for a bit of labor or other work (for example, one accountant prepared his vet's taxes in exchange for reducing the cost of surgery that his dog had had).

### Why Regular Checkups

Most pet owners need to lose the notion that vaccines are equivalent to disease prevention and that obtaining vaccines will be all that is necessary in providing good health care to their pets. Vaccines are certainly important in preventing disease and have done their job well. I rarely see the diseases that pets are routinely vaccinated against, which means the incidence of these once-common diseases have decreased greatly.



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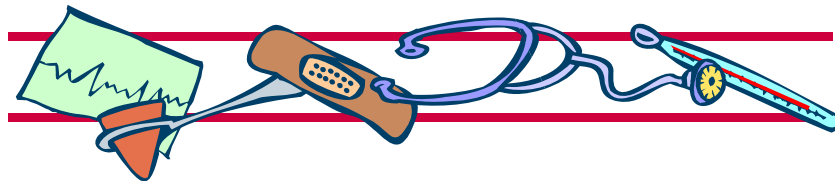
## VACCINES

Vaccination in itself is not without risk. There can be reactions, some serious and life threatening. In addition, some vaccines have been implicated in an increased risk of skin tumors called fibrosarcomas. In this respect, more is not better. Pets should be vaccinated based on their individual risk of being exposed to a certain disease. Pets should not receive vaccines that they may not need. Not surprisingly, immunity to vaccines has been shown to last longer than one year and that yearly vaccination may not be necessary for some diseases. Really, the focus on prevention of disease should be more so a factor of the type of animal, the age and the most common ailments that are likely to affect the individual pet, and not be just a series of vaccinations.

Many vets recommend examinations once or twice yearly because pets age at an accelerated rate. For each of their years, it is equivalent to about seven years for us. Dental care is very difficult to promote and extremely important to the health of the pet. The health of the teeth and gums is one of the most neglected aspects of animal care. Diseases of the teeth and gums can deteriorate the immune system due to chronic inflammation and infection. Bacteria from the mouth can invade the blood and infect the liver and kidneys, and also lodge on the valves of the heart causing serious heart disease.

Diet recommendations are also an essential part of keeping a pet healthy. Addressing behavior issues of a pet is another important aspect of health care. Please note: Felines and other mammals are unable to metabolize an anti-inflammatory drug. They should never be given these unless specifically directed by a vet (Tylenol, ibuprofen and aspirin)...Please check with your vet first before giving any medication.

**Vaccinations** have become controversial. Get all the facts and guidance from your veterinarian before making a decision.

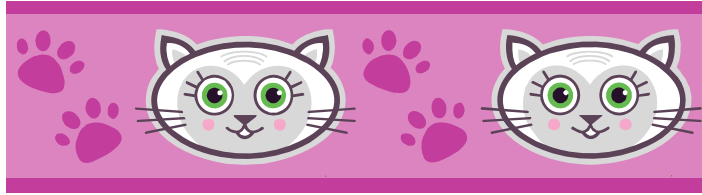


## KITTENS

Kittens which are born to friendly mothers will generally grow up to be friendly cats themselves but it is not always possible to meet the mother cat. Kittens are naturally curious, playful and trusting and unless frightened or tormented will grow up to be loving companions but it is best to avoid kittens which are shy or frightened.

Children should be taught to handle the kitten gently and to allow it to rest when tired. Kittens require a series of vaccinations for protection against cat diseases. The first vaccinations are usually given at about 7 weeks old. If your kitten has not been vaccinated prior to purchase you should arrange with your local veterinarian to start the vaccinations series as soon as possible. The kitten should be kept inside until the vaccinations are completed.

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Kittens need a different diet than adult cats and, having small stomachs and big appetites, need up to four or five meals per day. They should be fed nutritionally complete commercial kitten food which is available in both canned and dry forms. They should have access to fresh, clean water at all times. Food and water bowls should be shallow and clean. Cow's milk causes diarrhea in many kittens. Low lactose pets' milk is available. Kittens should be wormed with a kitten worming product, available from your veterinarian, pharmacy or pet shop, every two weeks from the age of three weeks.

Cats have a natural instinct to cover their waste so providing a litter tray in a quiet, easily accessible part of the house and showing the kitten its location is about all that is usually required to litter train your kitten. Most kittens will have been taught by their mother to scratch and cover their waste but placing the kitten in clean litter and scratching the litter will usually get the kitten copying you. For the first day take the kitten to the tray immediately it wakes up or after a feed. It will soon catch on. Cats do not like to eat in their bathroom so avoid placing food and water bowls close to the litter tray as this can be one of the common causes of cats not using a tray. Make sure the litter box is kept clean but do not clean it with disinfectants as cats dislike the strong smell of most cleaning products - hot soapy water is sufficient. If the kitten has an 'accident' it will be likely to return to the previously soiled areas so you will need to remove the odor. Never use cleansers containing ammonia as this will attract the kitten to the spot. Enzyme products are available from pet stores and supermarkets which not only clean but also will help remove the odor. Scratching carpets and upright surfaces is a natural behavior for cats as they do this to remove the outer sheath of their claws. To prevent damage to furniture provide a sisal or carpet covered scratching pole. Praise and reward the cat when it uses the scratching post.

### **Helpful hints**

- The humane society may know of lower-cost clinics or vets who are prepared to cut prices for people who are not particularly well off. It can't hurt to call around and ask.
- Some Popular suggestions to reduce your cat's anxiety during vet visits: Make sure to drive your cat around (WITHOUT going to the vet) to get it used to the car.
- Find a "cats only" vet.
- Find a vet who will make house calls.
- Find a vet who manages the lobby efficiently to reduce waiting time.
- Keep your cat away from dogs in the waiting room.
- Feliway is also great, as it helps to calm your cat in stressful situations.

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