

## Hilton Animal Hospital

### Feline Health & Wellness Recommendations 2012

The doctors of *Hilton Animal Hospital* have compiled this health recommendation document in an effort to prevent common problems and to give you the opportunity to have the most enjoyable relationship with your cat. It originates from common, preventable problems that we, as veterinarians, see all too often. Our recommendations are based on a consensus of our doctors, as well as the newest research that is available in feline medicine and behavior. In this document you may find recommendations that are new to you, or which your cats never had a problem with. Our recommendations are not meant to imply that every cat will develop problems, but rather that we see these issues in a high percentage of our patients.

#### **Water**

Water is the most important nutrient and our domestic cats do not consume enough of it. It is often forgotten, but it is a very important issue for our domestic cats - not consuming enough water will lead to serious consequences over a lifetime.

Cats are very particular about their water source. We recommend a water bowl made from glass so that light refracts thru it and makes the water source more interesting. Cats prefer water with no after-tastes, such as chlorine, plastic, metal, etc....Cold, fresh filtered or bottled water is best. Replenish the water for your cat twice a day.

Many cats are stimulated by moving water - we recommend a *Drinkwell*<sup>®</sup> water fountain as a secondary water source. The more interesting water options that you can provide for your cat, the more it will be likely to drink. Never allow contamination of your cat's water source. Such as, allowing dogs to drink from your cat's water or by adding anything to your cat's water; unless directed by your veterinarian.

#### **Diet**

Recent research in feline nutrition has shown that cats do best when they are fed a diet that approximates their natural prey items as much as possible: a high moisture diet that is high in protein and low in carbohydrates. Therefore, we can no longer recommend dry cat food for cats. A canned diet is preferable for optimum nutrition.

We strongly recommend purchasing cat foods & cat treats from reputable, trusted companies, such as **Hills Science Diet** or **The IAMS Company**, which have strict quality controls and are on the forefront of pet nutrition. Ideally, cats are meal-fed their correct calories twice a day. Please consult your veterinarian to help you select the correct diet for your cat. [www.hillspet.com](http://www.hillspet.com) or [www.iams.com](http://www.iams.com)

Many cats still enjoy eating dry cat food. For those individuals dry food can be offered as a mid-day snack or a food that can be incorporated into a cat toy that they can hunt throughout the house during the day.

Hairballs can be a problem for some cats. Offering some natural fiber, such as a daily tablespoon of canned pumpkin, can be very effective. Your veterinarian can also recommend nutritional additives that may help.

With regards to dental health, Hills T/D for cats is one of the few proven strategies to keep cat's teeth clean. We recommend this dry cat diet as a daily treat to prevent dental tartar buildup.

Be cautious of cat treats from manufacturers that you do not know, since they may contain ingredients that are not wholesome for your cat. Feed a balanced diet. Avoid table foods, milk, cooked or canned meats / fish.

## Examinations

Examinations provide an opportunity to detect and prevent potential health problems as early as possible. On average, pets age 7 times faster than people. In addition, cats are masters at hiding disease as an ancient means of survival. Therefore, we recommend two detailed examinations per year to ensure that your pet is healthy. The semiannual examinations also provide you an opportunity to talk to your veterinarian about problems or questions that you may have about the care of your cat. Your veterinarian will review behavior, diet, environment and other topics.

## Annual Wellness Laboratory Testing

As stated previously, cats hide disease very effectively and many times conditions make themselves known far too late. Detailed examinations only reveal a portion of a cat's health and since our patients cannot talk and fill in the rest of the picture, we rely on tests for additional information. Therefore, we recommend annual wellness testing for every adult cat. A wellness blood, urine, and blood-pressure test provides an opportunity to detect and address potential health problems as early as possible. At-risk cat should also be tested for Feline Leukemia and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus once a year.

## Environmental Enrichment

A big part of being a healthy cat is also being a happy cat. Making a cat's environment interesting enriches their lives. We strongly recommend that owners keep their cats safe in their homes; opposed to allowing them to stray unsupervised outside. However, the mental wellbeing of your cat is very important. Just like with children, playing outside for an hour or two, under supervision, has been shown to enrich our cat's lives. Indoors, cats enjoy cat trees, perches and sturdy scratching posts. Cats are predators, so laser pointers and human-powered cat toys keep cats active and interested in their environment. Consider rubbing catnip onto toys, perches and scratching posts to add additional pizzazz.

Cats love scratching posts, but most of them are very poorly constructed. There are many designs for scratching posts; the most important point about the design and construction of a scratching post is that it is very sturdy. Moderate force from a *human* should not move or topple the scratching post.

## Parasite Prevention

There are several intestinal parasites that can infest cats, many of which can be spread to humans. Kittens have a particularly high incidence of serious parasites; therefore we test and de-worm kittens multiple times during their kitten visits. A Fecal Flotation Test can detect the presence of intestinal parasites (intestinal worms and protozoa). Cats should be tested yearly.

Fleas and ticks are external parasites that can infest cats; these parasites seek out haired animals to feed from. Fleas and ticks can enter our houses in many different ways, so even indoor cats can potentially become infested.

Monthly Flea, Tick, Heartworm & Intestinal Parasite Control: We recommend a monthly application of **Revolution**<sup>®</sup>, which offers safe, easy and highly effective parasite control. Revolution<sup>®</sup> will protect your cat from fleas, ticks, roundworms, ear-mites, mange mites, and heartworms.

Heartworm Prevention: Cats can be infected with the dog-heartworm via a mosquito bite. Even indoor cats can be bitten by an infected mosquito: 25% of all heartworm infections in cats are found in cats that are classified as "indoor." If a cat is infected with heartworms, it usually stops eating and has a cough or difficulty breathing. The disease is fatal in many instances. We recommend a monthly dose of Revolution<sup>®</sup> to prevent heartworms in your cat.

## Dental Care

Dental disease is the leading cause of serious diseases in our cats. Chronically infected teeth and gums will cause damage and disease in the body and organs. We strongly recommend brushing your cat's teeth daily: have your veterinary support staff teach you how. It is easy to do - you would be surprised how many cats enjoy having their teeth brushed. In addition, using Hills t/d cat kibble as a daily treat will help delay plaque buildup. Avoid commercial dental care treats and implements until you have checked with your veterinarian for safety and effectiveness.

Occasionally you cat will have to have its teeth cleaned professionally by your veterinarian.

## Vaccinations

Kittens and cats have to be vaccinated to prevent serious diseases. In order to develop adult immunity levels, kittens are vaccinated 2 or 3 times, three weeks apart. Adult cats are initially vaccinated once a year. In the near future, research may show that new 3 year vaccine rotation protocols are better for older cats. Cats are vaccinated only for at-risk diseases; you and your veterinarian will discuss which diseases your cat is at risk for.

"Distemper" Vaccination (FRCP): Yearly Vaccination that protects against 3 important diseases: Feline Viral Rinotracheitis, Calicivirus, and Panleukopenia. This vaccine is recommended for all cats, since these diseases are highly contagious and the virus can also be transmitted from objects and people's hands and clothing. The vaccine is required any time animals come into close proximity: boarding, grooming and hospital visits.

Rabies Vaccination: Yearly vaccination. Rabies is a fatal viral disease that can be transmitted to humans, and state law requires the vaccination.

Feline Leukemia Vaccination: All cats that spend time unsupervised outdoors or indoor cats that may come in contact with infected cats should be vaccinated. The virus is transmitted by cat bites and the disease is fatal in most cases.

Feline Leukemia / Feline Aids Test: New kittens and cats should be tested for these fatal diseases before you introduce them into your household. At-risk cats, especially outdoor cats, should be tested yearly throughout their life.

## Spay and Neuter

Cats should be spayed or neutered before they reach sexual maturity; by the time they are 6 months old. If not, cats usually become very difficult to keep as pets. They start displaying highly undesirable behaviors, like urine marking, that are usually not well tolerated by their owners. In addition, there are a number of reproductive-related diseases that can develop in unaltered cats later in life.

## Litter Boxes

Elimination problems can cause serious consequences for a pet cat. In order to prevent elimination problems always ensure a pleasant litter box experience for your cat. Cats enjoy large, uncovered litter boxes with deep, clumpable, fine, unscented litter. Keep the litter box very clean and inviting at all times. The litter should be at least 2 to 3 inches deep and the litter box should ideally be 1 ½ times as long as your cat. At the very least, the litter boxes should be extra large or JUMBO size. The litter box should be in a private place, far away from the cat's food and water. For a multi-cat household we recommend one litter box per cat, plus one. Ideally, multi-level houses should have litter boxes on each level. Consider placing the litter box on a soft, easily-cleaned rug, so that any litter on the cat's paws gets caught when it steps out of the litter box. Do not allow anyone to disturb the cat when it is in the litter box. The plastic that the litter boxes are made of do absorb urine and ammonia. Therefore, we recommend buying a new litter box about once a year.

## Grooming & Nail Care

Even though regular bathing is probably not necessary, cats do benefit from the occasional bath to cleanse their coat and skin. Your veterinary hospital will gladly bathe your cat for you.

Longhaired cats often need help with their hair. Longhaired cats have to be combed to prevent matting. Gentle combing for any cat will help remove dead hair that the cat would otherwise have to swallow; special hair-removing combs are also useful. The FURminator ([www.furminator.com](http://www.furminator.com)) has shown a lot of promise in removal of hair. Whichever implements you select, make sure they are well-machined and will not scratch the skin. Check your cat for matted hair regularly and bring any skin abnormalities to the attention of your veterinarian.

Sharp cat nails can be very destructive around a house; therefore, nails should be trimmed on a regular basis. It is easy to cut a cat's nails, and your veterinary support staff will teach you how to trim them. It is very important to use a sharp, high quality cat nail trimmer to avoid hurting the cat.

## Identification

Millions of cats are lost and euthanized in the United States every year. Your veterinarian can implant a microchip under your cat's skin that will permanently identify your cat. It is not expensive and the implantation is similar to a routine injection. ([www.homeagain.com](http://www.homeagain.com))

If there is any reasonable possibility that your cat could run away, we strongly recommend a break-away cat collar with an ID-tag. SPCA research has shown that cats found with an ID-tag, with the owner's contact information, were returned home in most instances.

## Health Insurance

Veterinary care is becoming more and more sophisticated, but that also means these advanced treatments can be very costly. We strongly recommend that you protect your cat with pet health insurance - in most cases it is surprisingly affordable. There are many insurance companies to choose from: a list of companies that are endorsed by the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) can be found at [www.healthypet.com](http://www.healthypet.com). We recommend VIP pet insurance. ([www.petinsurance.com](http://www.petinsurance.com))

## Additional recommended information about cats and pets

Ohio State Indoor Cat Initiative: <http://indoorpet.osu.edu/cats/>

[www.veterinarypartner.com](http://www.veterinarypartner.com)

[www.catvets.com](http://www.catvets.com)

[www.cdc.gov/healthypets](http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets)

[www.healthypet.com](http://www.healthypet.com)

[www.avma.org/animal\\_health/](http://www.avma.org/animal_health/)

[www.petsandparasites.org/](http://www.petsandparasites.org/)

## Recommended Books

*From the Cat's Point of View* by Gwen Bohnenkamp

*Felinestein* by Cindy Ribarich

*Cats for Dummies* by Gina Spadafori