

## New Kitty Seminar by Barn Cat Buddies

Congratulations on deciding to adopt a new cat or kitten. We have put this kitty "tutorial" together for folks who want to increase their knowledge base. Two of our veterinarians have given thumbs up on the information. One doctor works in a busy shelter setting and the second works in a CAT ONLY hospital. We attempt to update this information yearly. We encourage you to do your own research 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 is 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. Purchase one large enough to accommodate a full-size cat even if you adopt a kitten now. Within a year, you will be glad you did! For comfort and security put down a towel or better yet, cut up an old bath mat with rubber backing to fit the carrier. This will give kitty security to grip onto during trips.

**Litter Boxes:** Trial and error will determine what type of box to use, but using ENOUGH litter boxes is ESSENTIAL. The Feline Health Center at Cornell University <http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc> strongly recommends having one litter box per cat.

**Hooded or Open Box:** Some cats are intimidated by litter boxes with hoods so if your kitty is pooping or peeing beside the box, or one cat is ambushing another by hiding behind the hood (that actually happens!) remove the hood. *\* However there are times when urinating/defecating outside of the litter box is a medical emergency:* We talk about that in more depth further along this primer.

Placing the box somewhere quiet and away from loud or vibrating washing machines is important. Cats need to feel secure about using the box and have been known to NOT use a box if loud noises are present. Some of course could care less.

**For Kittens:** Start with a shorter/smaller box so the kitten can climb over the rim.

**Litter Type:** There are as many different types of litter as there are cat colors! As a rule of thumb, stay away from fragrant smelling litter. Additionally Cornell University recommends two boxes per cat. Introduce your cat or kitten to anywhere you place a box so cat/kitten knows where the box(s) are to avoid accidents.

**Clay vs. Scoop Litter:** This is mostly preference of the pet parent. When kittens are very young, clay litter is not only the safest (clumping if swallowed can cause medical issues) but is also the cheapest to use. However, it gets dirty and wet very quickly and you will need to bleach out the box at least once a week.

**Scoop litter** is easy to use and does not allow urine to lie on the bottom of the litter box floor. This is why most people prefer it. Again, using something with the least amount of scent is preferable. Get yourself either a plastic or metal litter scooper.

**Cleaning Boxes:** If you use scoop litter - totally change out and put in new litter at least once a month. Bleach the box with one part Clorox to ten parts warm water. Make sure there is no residue bleach smell before you put new litter in. As mentioned above, using Clay Litter will determine total box cleaning and litter refreshing as often as once a week in multi cat households.

**LIGHTWEIGHT LITTER:** We have read some negatives about lightweight litter and do not recommend this for kittens at all. Some claim

1. lightweight litter sticks to paws
2. creates an upper respiratory infection.

Please do your own research too.

**New Kitty & Adjustments:** Choose a day or weekend when you know you'll be home from work or social obligations so you can spend lots of time with him/her. Remember, the cat or kitten you are adopting may have had several foster settings before coming to your house, so take it slow and you will be happier with the results!

The following are suggestions that have worked for others:

**Initial Confinement:** Confining your new cat or kitten to a small room or large bathroom with food, water and litter box for a few days is best. Hang out with your new friend frequently. **DO RESIST the temptation** to let your new cat or kitten roam the house. This will prove frustrating for both of you as the animal will most likely hide and cause some interruption in your resident animals' lives. **Meeting the Resident Animals:** Those paw touches under the door will be their first official meeting. Do not be alarmed if your cats hiss or swipe. It is natural. The next day take a clean rag or cloth & wipe new cat's body with it allowing the resident cat(s) to smell the new cat. Similarly wipe down resident cats with another rag and allow new cat to smell their scents. This **WIPE DOWN METHOD** works as a more intimate introduction for each animal.

It's funny to watch an occasional swat and growl at the rag, but this is totally natural. When the animals finally get to smell each other in person or through a baby gate (next

step), their scents will be familiar. We have more information on introducing new pets to resident pets and would be happy to email you if needed.

*At the end of the five days* a baby gate (if you can borrow one) is a great way for the new and resident animals to meet each other closer but also from a 'safe' distance. Of course, you want to have the baby gate up when you are home so no one jumps over the gate. *A few days later* (you be the judge if more time is needed) you can start introducing new kitty to resident kitties while you are in the room. The goal is to allow everyone enough time to get to know each other. Each will go at their own pace.

**NATURAL SUNLIGHT:** For indoor cats and kittens, natural light is so important. This may sound like a no-brainer, but a couple I knew years ago kept their cats in a nice downstairs area, but it did not get a lot of sunlight and they NEVER drew the blinds open. The indoor cats had terrible fur and they began shedding and scratching.

Moreover, just like humans, animals get depressed without natural sunlight. Raise blinds or shades (being careful to tie up any cords, which could get tangled around kitten or cat necks). In addition, if you can let some fresh air in that is great as long as there is no way for kitty to escape – cats are *savvy escape artists and have no problem pushing in screened windows*.

**HOLDING AND LIFTING YOUR NEW CAT:** Some animals are not keen on being lifted from their position off the floor all the way up to your height. If they fidget or meow to get down, don't push the issue or insist on holding them. Instead, start off sitting on the floor at their level (and their pace) on the floor. Then if they seem comfortable, bring them to your lap. Eventually the cat may enjoy being lifted, but forcing them to do it your way will just forge mistrust of you.

*ALWAYS GO AT THE CAT'S PACE & REMEMBER TO LET IT HAVE ITS SPACE*

**CAT FURNITURE:** Young cats (and even older ones) love kitty condos and cat trees. Cats love vertical spaces. These pieces if made of bark are helpful for appropriate places to scratch and naturally 'file' kitty nails. Get some loose catnip and rub it on the condos or cat trees as an attractant for the cat. If you are someone who does not appreciate cats on the furniture; a water bottle, sharp NO and spray to the feet will get the message across. Eventually, just going for the bottle is enough to have kitty race off the furniture.

**CAT TOYS:** Mature cats may not be into chasing balls or string but get a kick out of a toys with a feather attached to a wire handle or a laser pointer

**\* However always supervise children as a laser in eyes can blind your pet.**

There are track toys with that have balls that roll along a circular 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 also cheap 'toys' like ping-pong balls and empty toilet/paper towel rolls that can keep kittens active for hours.

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

1. Remove string items when you are not in the same room. Plastic bags too.
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. The scariest near CAT-astrophe I ever had involved my own cat when he jumped into the broiler unbeknownst to me and I had closed the door with him in it and turned the heat up. I figured it out before he was accidentally burned.

**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.

**DIETARY NEEDS:** What you feed your pets now determines your cat's health in the future. While we are not "anti" kibble, recent research indicates cats need LOTS of water for good health. In the wild, cats do not eat a main diet of 'kibble' and get their moisture content from the whole animal they consume. Dr. Lisa A. Pierson, DVM, states that in her [www.catinfo.org](http://www.catinfo.org) article: Feeding Your Cat: Know the Basics of Feline Nutrition states "Diet is the brick and mortar of health". Cats are designed to obtain most of their water with their diet since their normal prey contains approximately 70-75% water.

*The general consensus now is that CANNED FOODS more closely approximate the natural diet of the cat and are better suited to meet the cat's water needs."*

*A cat on dry food, even with constant access to fresh water, consumes about half the amount of water, as does a cat eating canned food. Dr. Pierson notes,*

*"This is a crucial point when one considers how common kidney and bladder problems are in the cat".*

*Dr. Lisa A. Pierson, DVM adds that*

*"An increasing number of American Veterinary Medical Association members, including board-certified veterinary internists, are now strongly recommending the feeding of canned food instead of dry kibble".*

**SO WHAT SHOULD I FEED? :** Start your cat/kitten on the best food you can afford. Brands like Blue Buffalo, Royal Canin, Halo, etc. are not cheap but lead the way in good feline nutrition. Some folks even believe that it helps reduce shedding and scratching. If expense is an issue, brands like Friskies or Fancy Feast are perfectly fine but we would

suggest you AVOID store brand foods (IE: Dollar Store or Food Lion or foods put out by a supermarket). They are typically of lesser quality.

Wet vs. Dry Food: At BCB we like to use a combination of wet and dry foods & the literature is leaning more and more toward wet only or wet and dry foods for cats. Some of the diseases cats are prone to can be avoided if they take in more liquids. A dry food only diet simply will not give them the moisture content they need. If you are just unable to stand canned food or your cat does not like it, putting a few tablespoons of water over their dry food (making a bit of a gravy) will tempt them and ensure your kitty gets at least some liquid in their diet.

**Controversial Fish:** We do not feed wet or dry fish food or fish flavored food just because we've read or experienced some negatives over the long term. There is a very good site that discusses fish food feeding in cats: <https://catnutrition.wordpress.com/.../eight-strikes-against.../>

**Treats:** Cornell University Feline Health Website: "Treats should only be fed *occasionally*. They should not be a steady diet for your cat, because they lack the proper proportion of basic nutrients a cat requires to maintain its health. A rule of thumb is not to let treats exceed 10 to 15 percent of the cat's daily diet".

*The article adds that giving cow's milk can give cats upset stomachs.*

**If You Are A Smoker:** Please avoid smoking around your pets. This great site shows discusses ways to keep your new cat or kitten safe:

<http://pawesomecats.com/2014/10/15/dangers-cigarette-smoking-around-cats/>

### Cat Litter Box Warning Signs by Dr. Shelley Spangler, DVM

Inappropriate Urination can be a symptom of a serious urinary or bladder infection. Always contact your veterinarian if you see these signs:

- Your cat squats and urinates in places other than its box.
- The cat becomes increasingly irritable. IE: fighting with other cats, biting, etc.
- The cat becomes withdrawn and/or cries when walking around.

*\*Note: If your kitty has Feline Urological Syndrome (FUS) s/he will be very uncomfortable.*

"A cat in pain will avoid using the litter box as it associates the pain with urinating there. Unfortunately many cats HAVE BEEN EUTHANIZED because their owners thought they were hopelessly "dirty cats". With proper guidance from a skilled professional, owners can easily correct this problem and the cat will return to the animal they knew who used the box appropriately. Ignoring the problem will make it worse not better."

You Can Read Dr. Spangler's Full Article On [www.barncatbuddies.org](http://www.barncatbuddies.org)

There are some times when cats 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 box (hooded or un-hooded) or the type of litter you always used (scented or unscented)?
3. Added a new cat to the household? Cats are very interesting animals, and litter boxes are personal. The resident cat should not have to 'share' their box with the new addition. It is important that new additions have their own litter box! Also, remember the rule of thumb (1 box per cat) per behaviorists.
4. New baby: While a happy occasion, having a new baby can make other members of the household stressed due to schedule changes, lack of sleep etc. It also normally reduces the amount of attention given to our pets, creates strange noises (crying) etc.
5. Moved to a new home or people moved out/moved in/divorces etc.
6. Has there been a change in the caregiver's lifestyle or work schedule?
7. Did behavior start after cat was declawed?

While we may get some heat on this, we know of cases where animals that have been declawed developed litter box issues. Whether it be from 'upset 'or pain in the feet, we are not exactly sure. We encourage people to do their homework and have some information below regarding DECLAWING. PS: you never want to declaw a cat that is feral or unsocial!

Always Consult Your Veterinarian for his/her advice first. Nevertheless, initially try adding an extra litter box to another part of the home. If after making whatever changes you can to accommodate the animal, the behavior has not changed, try calling [The Cornell University and their Feline Behaviorists at 1-800-KITTYDR.](#)

### Declawing Your Cat:

Veterinarian, Dr. Christianne Schelling author of the website [www.declawing.com](http://www.declawing.com) asks pet owners to consider these important facts before making the decision to declaw.

**Declawing is actually an amputation of the last joint of your cat's "toes".**

"Before you make the decision to declaw, be aware that a DECLAW is not like a deep nail trim. It is serious surgery. Your cat's claw is *not* a toenail. It is closely adhered to the bone. So closely adhered that (in order) to remove the claw, the last bone of your cat's claw has to be removed. When you envision that, it becomes clear why declawing is not a humane act. It is a painful surgery, with a painful recovery period." C.Schelling

## Options to Declawing:

The website <http://www.catscratching.com> provides many cat scratching solutions as well as insight into the psychology of why cats scratch. You can teach your cat to use a scratching post (sisal posts are by far the best). You can trim the front claws. You can also employ aversion methods. In addition, there is a wonderful invention called **Soft Paws** that are lightweight vinyl caps that you apply over your cat's own claws. They have rounded edges, so your cat's scratching does not damage your home and furnishings. You can find Soft Paws® on the web [www.softpaws.com](http://www.softpaws.com).

We believe CLAWS BELONG ON PAWS, but if all alternatives fail & a cat is in danger of being surrendered to a pound, we only recommend *LASER* DECLAWING.

For more articles on cat health, please go to [www.barncatbuddies.org](http://www.barncatbuddies.org)