

# NEW KITTEN HANDBOOK

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Your guide to raising a healthy, confident cat.



 **COBB & CO**  
VETERINARY CLINIC

847-741-6770  
[www.cobb.vet](http://www.cobb.vet)

# WELCOME TO COBB & CO

Congratulations on bringing home your new best friend.

The veterinarians and team at Cobb & Co Veterinary Clinic created this health and training guide to help you start off strong with your new kitten. Training and healthy habits begin the moment your kitten comes home. Early guidance helps build good behaviors before unwanted ones develop.

During the first few months, your kitten will receive a series of wellness exams and vaccines to support a growing immune system. These visits also give us the opportunity to answer questions, monitor development, and guide you through each stage of kittenhood.

Kittens grow and develop quickly during their first year. Early veterinary care, proper nutrition, and gentle handling help set the foundation for a healthy and confident adult cat.

As your cat grows:

- Kittens are seen every 3–4 weeks during their vaccine series
- Adult cats are seen yearly
- Senior cats benefit from twice-yearly exams

Our goal is for you to leave every visit feeling confident, informed, and supported in your cat's care.

We're here to guide you every step of the way.

# NEW KITTEN QUICK GUIDE

## CALL IMMEDIATELY IF...

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- Vomiting or diarrhea more than once
- Blood in vomit or stool
- Refuses food more than one meal
- Extreme lethargy
- Bloating or painful belly
- Pale, white, or blue gums
- Trouble breathing
- Sudden hiding
- Seizure or collapse
- Ate something toxic
- Swallowed foreign object
- Hit by car or injured
- Straining to urinate or not urinating

Do not give human medications!  
When in doubt – call. Kittens decline quickly.

## VACCINE SERIES

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Every 2–4 weeks  
until approximately 16 weeks of age

Core:  
FVRCP • Rabies

Lifestyle:  
FeLV

We'll tailor the schedule to *your* kitten.

## YEAR-ROUND PREVENTION

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Heartworm prevention  
Flea & tick prevention  
Fecal test now + every 6 months

## EARLY HANDLING (2-9 weeks)

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- Gentle handling
  - Nail trims
  - Carrier training
- Exposure to people
- Household sounds

Go slow. Keep it positive. Build confidence.

## WHAT'S NORMAL

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2-4 months:

- Play biting, climbing, zoomies

4-8 months:

- Increased independence, hunting play

Consistency now = easier adult cat later.

## DENTAL CARE

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Start brushing early.  
Small habits now prevent painful disease later.

## SPAY / NEUTER

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Timing depends on breed and size.  
We'll guide you on the best plan.

## WELLNESS VISITS

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Kittens: every 3–4 weeks  
Adults: yearly  
Seniors: twice yearly

# WHEN YOUR PET NEEDS CARE

## DURING BUSINESS HOURS – CALL US FIRST

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We offer same-day urgent care and emergency appointments during business hours whenever medically appropriate.

We prioritize urgent cases and make every effort to accommodate same-day needs.

If your kitten is sick, injured, or you're unsure how serious something is – call us. Our team will guide you on the next best step.

When possible, we prefer to examine your pet here – where we know their history and can coordinate follow-up care.



Call: 847-741-6770



Text: 847-713-1530



Book Online: [www.cobb.vet](http://www.cobb.vet) or scan here



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## AFTER HOURS OR LIFE-THREATENING EMERGENCIES

For true emergencies outside our business hours, proceed directly to the nearest emergency hospital.

### Thrive – Hoffman Estates Emergency

2700 W Higgins Rd  
Hoffman Estates, IL 60169  
618-495-5010

### Dundee Animal Hospital Emergency

199 Penny Ave  
East Dundee, IL 60118  
847-428-6114

### Elk Grove Veterinary Specialty & Emergency

1050 Bonaventure Dr  
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007  
847-584-0200

### VEG (Veterinary Emergency Group) – Schaumburg

1287 E Higgins Rd  
Schaumburg, IL 60173  
847-430-4938

### Emergency Veterinary Services - St. Charles

530 Dunham Rd  
St. Charles, IL 60174  
630-584-7447

### Veterinary Specialty Center – Bannockburn

2051 Waukegan Rd  
Bannockburn, IL 60015  
847-459-7535

# COMMON HOUSEHOLD TOXINS

Accidental exposures happen – especially with curious kittens.  
If you suspect or are unsure if your kitten has ingested something harmful, call us right away.

## Call Cobb & Co First

Call: 847-741-6770

If after hours, contact:  
ASPCA Animal Poison Control  
888-426-4435

Save these phone numbers in your phone now.

## TOXIC FOODS

- Chocolate
- Xylitol (found in sugar-free gum, candy, some peanut butter)
- Grapes and raisins
- Onions and garlic
  - Alcohol
  - Caffeine

## TOXIC MEDICATIONS

- Ibuprofen, naproxen, acetaminophen
  - ADHD medications
  - Antidepressants
  - Heart medications
- Vitamins and supplements

Even small amounts can be dangerous.

## HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS

- Cleaning solutions
- Rodenticides
- Insecticides
- Fertilizers
- Essential oils
- Permethrin (dog flea products)

## PLANTS

- Lilies (EXTREMELY toxic to cats!)
  - Sago palm
  - Tulips
  - Daffodils
- Houseplants of unknown safety

## SIGNS OF TOXICITY

- Vomiting or diarrhea
  - Drooling
- Tremors or seizures
- Lethargy, weakness, or collapse
  - Pale gums
- Difficulty breathing

If you notice any of these symptoms, seek care immediately.

## IMPORTANT

Do not induce vomiting at home unless instructed by a veterinarian.

Bring the product packaging or a photo of the label if possible.

# PREVENTATIVE WELLNESS CARE

## VACCINES

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Vaccines protect against serious and potentially life-threatening diseases. At Cobb & Co, we use both “core” vaccines (recommended for all cats) and vaccines recommended based on exposure risk. Your kitten’s schedule is tailored to their age, health, and immune development for optimal protection.

### FVRCP

Protects against three common and highly contagious viral diseases in cats.

- **Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis (Herpesvirus)** – Causes upper respiratory infection with sneezing, nasal discharge, eye inflammation, and fever. The virus can remain dormant and reactive during stress.
- **Calicivirus** – Another respiratory virus that can cause sneezing, oral ulcers, fever, and sometimes pneumonia.
- **Panleukopenia (Feline Distemper)** – A severe and often fatal virus that attacks the immune system and gastrointestinal tract. It spreads easily in the environment and is especially dangerous for young kittens.

### Rabies

Required by Illinois state law. Rabies is a fatal viral disease that affects the nervous system and can be transmitted to humans and wildlife. Even indoor cats are at risk through exposure to bats or other wildlife.

### FeLV (Feline Leukemia Virus)

A contagious viral disease spread primarily through close contact with infected cats. FeLV can cause:

- Immune suppression
- Chronic infections
- Anemia
- Certain cancers

FeLV vaccination is recommended for all kittens and for adult cats that spend time outdoors or live with other cats whose status is unknown.

Even strictly indoor cats benefit from vaccination, as viruses can enter homes on clothing, shoes, or visiting animals.

# PARASITE PREVENTION

Parasites are common – even in indoor cats. Consistent, year-round prevention protects both your kitten and your family.

## HEARTWORM DISEASE

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Heartworms are spread through mosquito bites. While less common in cats than dogs, infection can still occur and may cause serious lung disease.

Unlike dogs, there is no safe treatment for heartworm disease in cats, which makes prevention especially important.

Monthly preventatives protect against heartworm infection and are recommended for all cats – including indoor cats.

## INTESTINAL PARASITES

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Kittens are commonly born with intestinal parasites and may also become infected through grooming, fleas, prey animals, or contact with infected stool.

- Many kittens show no visible symptoms
- Diarrhea, vomiting, or poor growth may occur
- Routine fecal testing and deworming are essential
- Some parasites can infect humans

## EXTERNAL PARASITES (FLEAS & TICKS)

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Fleas are the most common parasite seen in kittens. We recommend year-round flea and tick prevention.

Fleas reproduce rapidly and can quickly infest a home environment. Consistent flea prevention helps protect both your kitten and your home environment.

## PREVENTATIVE PRODUCTS

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We recommend purchasing preventatives through a veterinarian or trusted veterinary pharmacy to ensure proper storage, manufacturer guarantees, and product authenticity.

Curious about parasite trends in our area? Visit [www.capcvet.org](http://www.capcvet.org) for interactive maps based on local testing data.

# FECAL SCREENING

Many intestinal parasites show no visible symptoms. Early detection protects both your kitten and your family.

## When Should I Submit a Sample?

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- Bring a fresh sample (about a teaspoon) collected within 24 hours
- Kittens are tested frequently during the first several months of life
- Adult cats should have fecal testing twice yearly
- Samples may be dropped off during business hours

## Why Do We Test?

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- Parasites shed intermittently – a negative test does not always mean parasite-free
- The CDC recommends frequent testing and deworming in young kittens
- Some parasites can infect humans, especially children
- Routine testing and hygiene greatly reduce this risk

*If you have concerns about parasite transmission to people, speak with your (human!) physician.*

## How to Collect a Sample

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- Provide a fresh sample (approximately one teaspoon)
- Avoid contamination with soil, grass, or lawn chemicals
- Use a sealed plastic bag or small container
- Collection kits are available at Cobb & Co free of charge
- Avoid paper towels, wipes, glass jars, or medication bottles

## Results

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- Results are typically available within 48 business hours
- Negative results are sent via text message
- Positive results are communicated by phone with treatment instructions

# SPAY & NEUTER

Spaying or neutering is an important part of preventive health care.

## Why Consider Spay or Neuter?

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- Prevents unwanted litters
- Eliminates the risk of uterine infection (pyometra) in females
- Significantly reduces mammary cancer risk when performed early
- Prevents testicular cancer and urine spraying in males
- Reduces roaming and some hormone-driven behaviors

## How We Approach Timing

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Cats should be spayed & neutered between 4-6 months old.

## What to Expect Around Surgery

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- Pre-surgical exam and bloodwork to ensure safety
- Same-day procedure and discharge in most cases
- Pain management tailored to your kitten
- Clear written aftercare instructions
- Activity restriction (play and jumping) for several days post-surgery

Recovery is typically smooth, and most kittens resume normal activities quickly with proper rest and pain control.

# MICROCHIPPING

A microchip provides permanent identification and significantly increases the likelihood of reunion if your pet becomes lost.

Collars and tags can fall off. A microchip stays with your pet for life.

## How Microchipping Works

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- A small microchip (about the size of a grain of rice) is placed just under the skin
- Each chip contains a unique identification number
- Veterinary clinics and animal shelters can scan the chip to access your registered contact information

Placement is quick and similar to a routine vaccine. Microchipping can be performed during a wellness visit or at the time of spay/neuter surgery.

## Why We Recommend It

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- Provides permanent identification
- No batteries or maintenance required
- Dramatically increases reunion rates
- Safe and widely used

Microchipping is one of the simplest and most effective ways to protect your pet.

## Registration Is Essential

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We use Petlink as our microchip registry and register all microchips we implant on your behalf at the time of placement.

You will receive confirmation from Petlink with instructions for accessing and managing your account. Please review your contact information to ensure it is accurate.

If your pet was microchipped elsewhere, we are happy to help you identify the chip company and confirm that registration is complete and up to date.

If your phone number, address, or email changes, update your Petlink account promptly to ensure you can be reached if your pet is found.

# DENTAL CARE

Dental health is an important part of your kitten's overall wellness. Starting early makes care easier and helps prevent painful disease later in life.

## Why Dental Care Matters

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- Dental disease causes pain, bad breath, and tooth loss
- Advanced disease can impact the heart, liver, and kidneys
- Prevention is far easier (and less costly) than treatment
- Cats often hide dental pain

Dental disease is *the most common medical condition* in adult cats. Without consistent home care, most cats show signs by three years of age.

## Home Care Recommendations

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Daily brushing is the gold standard for preventing dental disease.

- Use a soft toothbrush or finger brush
- Use toothpaste formulated for cats (never human toothpaste)
- Start slowly and keep sessions positive
- Consistency matters more than perfection

If daily brushing is not possible, we can discuss alternatives such as dental diets, treats, or water additives. Visit [www.vohc.org](http://www.vohc.org) for additional proven methods to help prevent dental disease.

## Professional Dental Cleanings

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Even with good home care, most cats require professional dental cleanings over time.

- Performed under general anesthesia for safety and thorough evaluation and cleaning
- Includes full oral examination and dental x-rays to look for disease we can't see with our eyes alone
- Allows treatment of painful or infected teeth

Routine dental assessments are part of every wellness visit.

## Our Philosophy

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Small, consistent habits started in kittenhood make a lifelong difference. Routine dental cleanings are an important part of overall wellness care.

# NUTRITION

Proper nutrition supports healthy growth, immune function, brain development, and long-term wellness – especially during the rapid growth of the first year.

## Choosing a Diet

We recommend feeding a complete and balanced commercial diet formulated for kittens.

Look for diets that:

- Meet AAFCO standards for growth
- Are produced by companies with veterinary nutrition expertise
- Have undergone feeding trials

If you have questions about specific brands or ingredients, we're happy to guide you.

## Feeding Schedule

- 8–12 weeks: 3–4 meals daily
- 3–6 months: 3 meals daily
- 6 months and older: 2 meals daily

Portion sizes should be adjusted based on body condition, not just the feeding chart on the bag.

Your kitten should have a visible waist and a gentle abdominal tuck when viewed from the side.

Avoid free-feeding dry food whenever possible. Fresh water should be available at all times.

## Treats and Supplements

Treats should make up no more than 10% of daily calories.

Avoid:

- Excessive table scraps
- Rawhide chews (risk of obstruction)
- Unbalanced homemade diets

## When to Ask Us

Contact us if you notice:

- Poor growth
- Excessive weight gain
- Persistent diarrhea
- Food refusal
- Skin or coat concerns

We are happy to review your kitten's diet at any visit.

# GROOMING & COAT CARE

Regular grooming supports skin health, comfort, and early detection of problems. Starting early helps your kitten feel comfortable with routine handling.

## Brushing

Most cats benefit from regular brushing, especially long-haired breeds. Brushing helps:

- Remove loose hair and reduce shedding
- Prevent matting and tangles
- Reduce hairballs
- Allow early detection of skin problems

## Hairballs

Cats naturally ingest hair during grooming, which can occasionally lead to hairballs.

Occasional hairballs can be normal, but **frequent vomiting is not**. Contact us if your cat experiences:

- Frequent hairballs
- Repeated vomiting
- Loss of appetite
- Lethargy

Regular brushing can significantly reduce hairball formation.

## Nail Care

- Most cats require trims every 2–4 weeks
- Sharp nails can damage furniture and skin
- Early positive exposure reduces future stress

We are happy to trim nails during visits or demonstrate proper technique if needed.

Providing scratching posts or pads also helps maintain healthy claws and encourages natural scratching behavior.

## Ears

Check ears weekly. Healthy ears are clean, dry, and odor-free. Routine ear cleaning is not necessary for most cats.

Contact us if you notice redness, discharge, odor, or frequent head shaking.

# KITTEN DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

Your kitten will change rapidly during the first year of life. Understanding normal developmental phases helps you respond with patience, consistency, and confidence.

## Socialization Period (2-7 weeks)

This is the most important learning window. Kittens are highly receptive to:

- New people
- Household sounds
- Gentle handling
- Grooming and nail trims
- Carriers and transport

Positive early experiences during this time help kittens grow into confident adult cats.

## Exploration Period (8-16 weeks)

Kittens become increasingly curious and playful during this stage. Common behaviors:

- Climbing, jumping, pouncing, hunting play
- Increased energy and activity
- Investigating new environments

This is an excellent time to introduce:

- Scratching post, interactive toys, safe climbing areas
- Gentle handling of paws, ears, and mouth

Providing appropriate outlets for play helps prevent unwanted behaviors later.

## Juvenile Period (4-6 months)

Kittens become more independent and confident. You may notice:

- Increased exploration
- More active play
- Testing boundaries
- Developing hunting behaviors

Consistent routines and daily play sessions help channel energy and maintain positive behavior.

# KITTEN DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

## Adolescence (6–12 months)

This stage is often described as the “teenager” phase. You may notice:

- Increased independence
- Sudden bursts of energy (“zoomies”)
- More climbing and jumping
- Testing household rules

This stage can feel frustrating, but it is normal development. Regular play, enrichment, and consistent routines help guide kittens through this stage.

## Emotional Maturity (1-2 years)

Many cats do not fully “settle” until 1-2 years of age.

Patience and positive interactions help shape a confident, well-adjusted adult cat.

## Environmental Enrichment

Providing mental and physical stimulation is essential for healthy development.

Cats benefit from:

- Vertical space (cat trees or shelves)
- Interactive toys
- Scratching posts or pads
- Daily play sessions
- Safe resting areas

Enrichment helps prevent boredom, stress, and behavior problems.

## When to Reach Out

Please contact us if you notice:

- Persistent fearfulness
- Sudden behavior changes
- Aggression toward people or other pets
- Litter box avoidance

# LITTER BOX BASICS

Most kittens naturally use a litter box, but proper setup and routine are important for long-term success. A clean, accessible litter box helps prevent accidents and supports healthy elimination habits.

## Number of Litter Boxes

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- Number of cats + 1 litter box
  - 1 cat → 2 litter boxes
  - 2 cats → 3 litter boxes

Multiple boxes help reduce stress and prevent competition between cats.

## Location Matters

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Place litter boxes in quiet, easily accessible areas of the home. Avoid placing litter boxes:

- Near food or water bowls
- In high-traffic areas
- In locations where a kitten might feel trapped

If your home has multiple floors, place at least one litter box on each level.

## Litter & Box Type

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Most kittens prefer **unscented, clumping litter** with a soft texture. Strong fragrances can discourage use.

Many cats prefer uncovered litter boxes, which provide better airflow and visibility.

## Cleaning the Litter Box

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Cats are naturally clean animals and may avoid dirty litter boxes. We recommend:

- Scooping at least once daily
- Fully replacing litter weekly
- Washing the box monthly (and as needed) with mild soap and water

Keeping the litter box clean helps prevent accidents.

## When to call us

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Call us if you notice:

- Straining in the litter box
- Frequent trips to the litter box with little urine
- Blood in urine or stool
- Urinating or defecating outside the box
- Sudden changes in litterbox habits

Changes in litter box behavior are often **medical, not behavioral**.

If your cat suddenly stops using the litter box, please contact us so we can help identify the cause.

# ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT

Cats thrive when their environment allows them to express natural behaviors such as climbing, scratching, hunting, and resting in safe spaces. Providing appropriate outlets for these behaviors helps prevent boredom, stress, and behavior problems.

## Vertical Space

Cats naturally seek elevated resting places where they can observe their surroundings.

Providing vertical space helps cats feel secure and confident.

Examples include:

- Cat trees or towers
- Window perches
- Wall-mounted shelves
- Furniture that allows safe climbing

Vertical spaces are especially important in multi-cat households.

## Interactive Play

Regular play sessions help kittens develop coordination and provide healthy physical and mental stimulation.

Interactive toys that mimic prey are often most engaging.

Examples include:

- Wand toys
- Feather toys
- Small moving toys that mimic prey
- Puzzle feeders

Short daily play sessions help satisfy natural hunting instincts and reduce destructive behaviors.

## Scratching

Scratching is a normal and necessary behavior for cats. Scratching helps cats:

- Maintain healthy claws
- Stretch muscles
- Mark territory

Provide multiple scratching surfaces such as:

- Vertical scratching posts
- Horizontal scratching pads
- Cardboard or sisal surfaces

Placing scratching posts near sleeping areas or common resting spots encourages use.

## Carrier Comfort

Many cats associate carriers with stressful experiences. Leaving the carrier out in your home allows your cat to view it as a familiar and safe space.

You can help create positive associations by:

- Placing soft bedding inside
- Offering treats or toys in the carrier
- Allowing your cat to explore it freely

Comfort with a carrier makes veterinary visits and travel much less stressful.

## When to Reach Out

Contact us if you notice:

- Sudden behavior changes
- Aggression toward people or other pets
- Persistent hiding
- Destructive scratching or biting
- Difficulty adapting to household changes

Early guidance can help prevent behavior concerns from becoming long-term problems.

# INDOOR CAT WELLNESS

Indoor cats often live longer than outdoor cats, but they still benefit from regular veterinary care and a healthy home environment. Preventative care and enrichment help indoor cats stay active, healthy, and mentally stimulated throughout life.

## Routine Veterinary Care

Even cats that live entirely indoors should receive regular veterinary checkups. Routine visits help monitor:

- Weight and body condition
- Dental health
- Vaccine protection
- Parasite prevention
- Early signs of medical disease

Cats are very good at hiding illness. Regular exams help detect problems early, when they are often easier to treat.

## Weight Management

Weight gain is one of the most common health concerns for indoor cats. Excess weight can increase the risk of:

- Diabetes
- Arthritis
- Heart disease
- Reduced mobility

Feeding measured meals, providing enrichment, and maintaining daily play sessions help keep indoor cats at a healthy weight.

## Mental Stimulation

Indoor cats benefit from opportunities to express natural behaviors. Helpful enrichment includes:

- Interactive play sessions
- Puzzle feeders
- Window perches
- Cat trees or vertical climbing areas
- Rotating toys to maintain novelty

Mental stimulation helps reduce boredom and stress.

## Safe Exploration

Many indoor cats enjoy supervised access to new environments. Options may include:

- Secure window perches
- Screened patios or “cattios”
- Leash and harness training (for some cats)

These activities allow safe exploration while protecting cats from outdoor hazards.

## When to Reach Out

Contact us if you notice:

- Sudden changes in appetite or weight
- Decreased activity or mobility
- Changes in grooming habits
- Increased hiding or behavior changes

Indoor cats often show very subtle signs of illness. If something about your cat's behavior seems unusual, trust your instincts and reach out to our team.

# PET INSURANCE

Unexpected illness or injury can happen at any age. Pet insurance helps families prepare for the financial side of medical care so decisions can be based on what is best for your pet – not just cost.

## Why Consider Pet Insurance?

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- Helps offset the cost of accidents and unexpected illness
- Provides financial flexibility during emergencies
- Allows access to advanced diagnostics and treatment when needed
- Can reduce stress during already difficult situations

## When to Enroll

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Pet insurance is most effective when started early.

- Most policies do not cover pre-existing conditions
- Premiums are often lower when pets are enrolled young
- Waiting periods may apply before coverage begins

Review policy details carefully so you understand what is covered and what is excluded.

## What to Look For in a Policy

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Every company and policy is different. We encourage families to compare options and choose the plan that best fits their needs and budget. Consider asking:

- What is covered / not covered?
- How are reimbursements calculated?
- Are there per-year or lifetime caps?
- Are pre-existing conditions excluded?

## Our Role

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We do not endorse specific insurance companies. We are happy to provide medical records and documentation needed for claims and to answer questions about treatment plans.