

HOW TO KITTEN AND CAT PROOF YOUR HOME

It's finally time to bring your new kitten or cat home with you!! While the event itself is very exciting; it is also a huge change and trauma for the feline, no matter how loving the new home and family. Being prepared ahead of time will greatly ensure that the actual transition for your new furry family member is as quiet, calm and comfortable as possible. Kittens and cats are by their nature VERY curious about their surroundings, so you will need to make sure there are no hidden "escape routes" that lead outdoors for your indoor-only kitty. If you have young children, or any concerns about the cat getting out, you can even make and post small signs at each doorway reminding the family to close them carefully and watch for kitties!!

All windows, including bathroom and kitchen must have screens. A leading cause of accidents and death in house cats is a fall from a window. Passing birds are a great distraction for a cat. Cats don't know if they are on the 1st or 10th floor of a building and will lunge after them with deadly consequences. Even if the fall is from a low floor, the cat often distracted and petrified will run out into traffic or be unable to find its way home.

Keeping your toilet bowl closed after use is a must for small kittens. If you take baths check to make sure the kitten/s are not in the bathroom and close the door before turning on the tap. Small kittens can easily drown in a toilet bowl or bathtub. They become exhausted from trying to get out and will drown in very little time. Move glass or breakable treasures inside a locked cabinet, or use special anchoring clay to keep them secured from being knocked over by an inquisitive paw. Always keep your washing machine and dryer doors closed, and check carefully before and after each use to make sure your kitty hasn't somehow gotten inside. For some reason, all kittens seem to love exploring underneath the refrigerator - make sure that they cannot get all the way under or behind the refrigerator by filling up those spaces or putting boards or other material there to keep the kitties out.

Move all toxic materials so that they are out of reach (or better yet, safely locked in a secured cabinet) for your cat. All human medication, including pain killers and vitamin pills are poisonous to cats. If you drop a pill be sure to find it and place it where your cat can't find it. Remove all poisonous items from your home. This includes household cleansers, especially those with pine, car products such as anti-freeze, small sharp objects, poisonous plants, etc. Cover outlets and hide or heavily cover with tapes or plastic conduit electrical cords as cats and young teething kittens like to gnaw on such items. Watch for lightweight table lamps that can fall over; heavy irons that can fall off ironing boards; reclining chairs where kittens and cats can get up way inside and suffocate, or get trapped and badly injured or killed when someone unknowingly sits down at the wrong time. If you have a sofa bed make sure the kitten/s or cat/s are accounted for before closing it. Never allow a guest to close it. A cat or a kitten can get into the well of the sofa bed, closing it with the cat inside can break their back and kill them. Keep all paper shredders turned off and unplugged. Never leave the machine unattended while operating it.

It's best to keep real houseplants in a separate, closed area, away from any contact with your cats. Silk plants make an attractive, safe substitute. This way, the cat does not come in contact with any poisonous plants, nor have the opportunity to ingest or come in contact with any potential parasites in the soil. Be sure to remove all strands of spaghnum moss, to avoid having your kitty ingest them. A professional veterinarian should be contacted immediately if your cat suddenly collapses, has repeated vomiting or severe diarrhea, or shows signs of excessive irritation (red, swollen, blistering or raw) of skin of the mouth or throat. Any cat or kitten who becomes lethargic and loses interest in their food for a day or more may also have ingested something potentially dangerous, and professional help should be sought. If you actually see your cat eat something that you suspect to be poisonous, do not attempt to make the cat vomit yourself. Take the cat to the vet with a sample of the plant (a plant label or means of identification would also be most helpful). This will help the vet to find a treatment or antidote to the poison. Keeping notes of the time of eating and any symptoms may also be very helpful to your vet, as sometimes several days can pass between the ingestion of the harmful material and the actual effects showing up in your cat. Contact with the leaves, stems or sap of certain plants can cause rashes and hypersensitivity to sunlight resulting in sunburn. In cats these plants may cause blistering or itching of the mouth and gums, which can sometimes be

misdiagnosed as gingivitis. Sneezing and eye problems can also be caused through contact with these plants. For a listing of toxic plants, go to:

http://www.aspca.org/site/PageServer?pagename=pro_apcc_toxicplants

Be very aware that not all cat toys are safe - be especially careful about leaving any string, yarn, thread, dental floss, needles, safety pins, rubber bands, small pieces of a toy like eyes or bells that can easily come off and be ingested. Unfortunately, having a feline swallow a foreign object is a fairly common and often fatal event which almost always could have been prevented. Make sure that any toys you make or purchase have no small or sharp pieces that can poke or be chewed off and be swallowed. Cats seem to love household items such as twist ties for plastic bags, but these can be deadly. Twist ties can be swallowed and perforate intestines. You can make aluminum foil balls that your cat will love because they are easy to bat around and make a nice noise on hard floors, but be sure to wad the foil up very tightly so your kitty can't chew off and swallow bits of foil, and also be sure the ball is large enough that we can't swallow it.

Other types of potential hazards for kittens and cats include anything with loops on them, such as grocery paper or plastic bags with the carry handles still on them; litter box liners of the drawstring type if they are pulled closed and the loop is left where kittens can get stuck in them, and even the vertical pulls for window blinds. All of these can be deadly if the kitty gets his or her head caught in the loop. Keep ALL plastic bags safely away from kitties.

PURCHASE NEEDED SUPPLIES AHEAD OF TIME

You will definitely want to have on hand: food and water dishes (we recommend porcelain, china and stainless steel, and recommend getting your new kitty her own set, even if you already have a set for another feline). Do not use plastic as it holds bacteria and can cause a condition called feline acne. A litter box covered or uncovered, whatever will work best for your kitties. Be sure to place the litter box in an easily accessible location, away from the food and water area. Litter, a pooper scooper, cat furniture such as scratching posts (make sure the post does not knock over easily and allows the cat to extend it's full length in order to scratch). The proper food as discussed in your interview. A cat carrier; either the hard kennel type or a soft carrier such as Sherpa (<http://www.sherpapet.com/>). NEVER use a cardboard box or cardboard carrier for your cat. A cat can very easily escape from it, facing certain death if outside on the street or on a subway platform.

HOLIDAY SAFETY TIPS

The holidays are fun to celebrate, but beware of the additional dangers they hold for felines. Holiday plants such as mistletoe, holly berries and even poinsettias can be harmful or fatal if ingested by your kitty. Burning candles are a no-no, not only for the immediate danger to your pets, but because they can be easily knocked over spilling hot wax, and become obvious fire hazards. When you are entertaining, please be considerate of your feline's feelings, and be sure your kitty has a safe place to retreat to, with familiar surroundings and a quiet, calm environment. And remember too, that your guests may inadvertently let your indoor kitty outdoors in the excitement of the festivities. Be sure to firmly tack down all exposed wiring, and protect the wires from curious, sharp little teeth by covering the cords with plastic pvc material, thick wrapping tape, and/or spraying with a scent deterrent such as "Bitter Apple". If you decide to give your kitty a little treat of chicken or turkey, please tear the meat carefully into small pieces, and make sure there are no bones, or pieces of bones, in the treat, as these can cause serious intestinal blockage and damage, which can even be fatal. A little treat is much easier on a kitty's delicate system than a huge amount of a food he or she is not used to. Believe it or not, even potpourri liquids can be dangerous to your feline, as they contain

natural or essential oils, which if ingested can cause vomiting, stomach upset, diarrhea, weakness, and possibly liver damage. Some products also contain cationic detergents, in which case the signs tend to be even worse. Cats are most often exposed to potpourri oils by rubbing against leaky bottles or pots containing the oil, or from spilling the oil containing pots over themselves.

If you have a Christmas tree, it should stand in a flat, wide base. Try to anchor the tree with ceiling and/or wall hooks to help keep the tree from tipping over. Be aware that many felines see trees as fabulous climbing posts, so be certain that your tree decorations are kitty-safe. In some cases, you would be better off putting your tree in a room with doors that close, or trying a decorative large wreath placed out of your kitty's way instead. Remember that metal ornament hooks can get caught in feline mouths, and that cranberry and popcorn strands can be deadly to pets, causing intestinal obstruction or getting wrapped around your pet's neck. Tinsel can cause intestinal obstruction and blockage if swallowed, and glass balls can break in an animal's mouth. Broken pieces can cut the skin and be deadly if ingested. Angel hair is spun glass, and will shred the intestines if swallowed, and decorative artificial snow or tree flocking can be ingested or inhaled and damage kitty's nasal passages. Batteries contain a highly corrosive acid that can burn a pet's mouth if it leaks or the container is broken by chewing, so be sure to keep all batteries stored safely away from your feline. And, please do not tie ribbons around your kitty's neck!! Ribbons are extremely dangerous in that they can twist and tighten, causing choking or even strangulation. And pets can hang themselves if the ribbon gets caught on an object. Plus, cats love to play with ribbons, and these can work their way into the intestinal tract and do terrible damage if they are ingested.

SYMPTOMS OF A FELINE SWALLOWING A FOREIGN OBJECT; WHAT TO DO

If you see a piece of yarn, audio tape, string, tinsel, etc. protruding from your cat or kitten's mouth or anus, do NOT attempt to pull it out! It could be wrapped around your cat's intestines and by pulling, you might inadvertently kill kitty!! Instead, take your kitty in to your vet IMMEDIATELY!! Other symptoms that might occur even if nothing foreign is showing: your kitty is having difficulty breathing, vomiting or trying to vomit, coughing, bleeding from the mouth or anus, convulsing, frothing at the mouth or intensive salivating, or has a swollen tongue. Any of these symptoms require IMMEDIATE veterinary care and intervention. If your regular vet is closed or unavailable, take your kitty to the closest emergency veterinary hospital.

YOUR NEW LIFE TOGETHER

Once your cat is comfortable with the house, and knows where her food and water dishes, litter boxes (at least one per floor in a multi-level home) and scratching posts are, you can help her get started learning your household and family routines, which will now include her. Cats seem to thrive on consistency, and keeping her feeding and play times to a specific part of the day will be very calming for her, and probably for you too!! She will be more open to learning to recognize her name, your voice, the different personalities of your human family members, the household rules about jumping, scratching, etc. Just like humans, each cat is a unique individual, and it is important not to have unrealistic expectations of your kitty's personality. As she becomes more comfortable with you, she will open herself up and show you her individuality. Let her know that she is a full member of your family now, and she will reward you, in her own time and way, with her trust, her affection, and her love.