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SELECTING A CAT

Robert J. Landon, DVM – 04/18/2011

Before bringing your new cat home, prepare places for it to eat, sleep, and eliminate. Purchase necessary accessories such as a litter box, litter, toys, and food and water bowls. Pet-proof your home by keeping toxic chemicals and plants out of reach, and make sure windows are securely screened when open so that your cat cannot escape. Be sure to provide appropriate scratching materials, such as a scratching post, so your cat can stretch and sharpen its claws without damaging your furnishings. Plan to spend time training your cat so that it becomes comfortable with handling and grooming, and learns how to play and interact with people. Provide different kinds of play with a variety of toys, balls, or even a climbing tower. Kittens need frequent attention to socialize them to people and acquaint them with new things and experiences. Careful supervision also helps the kitten learn the rules of the household. If you already have a cat and wish to add another, matching personality types may help the transition go more smoothly. For example, quiet cats should be matched with those of similar temperament. When another cat or kitten enters the home, introductions should proceed slowly with periods of isolation and separation until each cat learns to accept the other. If problems arise, consult your veterinarian for help. Appropriate toileting areas are essential when multiple cats live together. This means at least one litter box per cat in more than one location. Food, water bowls, scratching posts, and resting areas should also be spaced throughout the home. To ensure they live long, healthy lives, cats require regular veterinary medical checkups. Ask your veterinarian about a vaccination program and other preventive medical care appropriate for your cat's lifestyle and to protect against disease risks in your area. Your veterinarian can also help you learn how to detect subtle signs of illness, since cats are good at concealing when they don't feel well.

— KITTEN TIPS —

- Seven to nine weeks is considered the ideal time for a kitten to move into a new home.
- Spaying or neutering your new pet is an important part of responsible pet ownership. Talk to your veterinarian about the best time to have your kitten spayed or neutered to prevent unwanted litters.
- When possible, meet the kitten's parents — their physical and behavioral characteristics may provide a clue as to how your kitten will be as an adult.
- If you already have a pet (or more than one pet) and plan to get a cat, remember that your other pets may be less enthusiastic about your new addition than you are. Ask your veterinarian about the best ways to introduce your pet to its new animal family.
- *String is NOT a good toy for cats.* If a cat eats string (or ribbon), it can develop life-threatening intestinal problems. There are many safe toy alternatives available at pet stores.

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