



CatWatch

Expert information on medicine, behavior and health from a world leader in veterinary medicine



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IN THE NEWS ...

A Warning on Human Skin Cancer Cream

The Food and Drug Administration is warning owners, veterinarians, healthcare providers and pharmacists of the risk of pets' illness and death associated with the topical human cancer medication fluorouracil.

Initial reports cited the death of five dogs who accidentally ingested the prescription cream, which is also sold as Carac, Efudex and Fluoroplex. While the FDA has yet to receive reports involving cats, the agency expects cats to be extremely sensitive to the cream, which is used to treat pre-cancerous and cancerous skin growths. If an owner applies the cream and touches his cat, the cat may accidentally ingest it when grooming.

The FDA recommends that cloths or applicators be cleaned or safely discarded to avoid leaving residue on hands and clothing. If you or someone in your household uses topical medications containing fluorouracil and your cat becomes exposed, consult a veterinarian immediately. ♦

Ticks Become a Full-time Menace

Warmer weather and an increase in their carriers combine to extend their reach and health threat

If you think your cat can't get ticks or the diseases that they spread, emerging evidence indicates otherwise. While cats, unlike dogs, are fairly resistant to tick-borne diseases, they can be affected, says Meredith L. Miller, DVM, ACVIM, a lecturer in small animal medicine at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine.

One of those diseases is a merciless killer with a tongue-twister of a name: cytaux-



Outdoor cats are at highest risk, especially if they live in wooded areas where ticks thrive.

zoonosis — more informally known as bobcat fever. "This is a very serious and often fatal disease caused by protozoa called cytauxzoon felis," Dr. Miller says.

Prime Season.

The disease is most likely to strike between March and

September, when the incidence of ticks is at its highest. Cats with cytauxzoonosis seem fine one day, sick the next. They develop a high fever, become depressed or lethargic

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A New Definition for Animal Hoarding

It's no longer considered obsessive compulsive behavior but paranoia, depression and an attachment disorder

Can you identify the animal hoarder in your community? Is she the neighbor who has cats gathering in her yard? Perhaps it's the quiet man who keeps his window shades closed? Or an outgoing community leader? How can you determine the difference between an animal hoarder and someone who responsibly cares for multiple pets?

The majority of hoarders are women, and the most common animal victims are cats, with dogs second. However, animal hoarders come in all income levels and ages. While they were believed to have an obsessive-compulsive basis, the American Psychological Association

suggests that hoarders suffer attachment disorders, paranoia and depression.

Often in Denial. As director of the Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, Elizabeth Berliner, DVM, MA, ABVP, has participated in more than a dozen hoarding investigations and says, "Typically, animal hoarders do not recognize that they're failing to provide adequate care, and they may not even recognize death."

Each year, between 900 and 2,000 new cases of animal hoarding impacting as many

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CatWatch

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SHORT TAKES

Become a Citizen Scientist and Help Research Ticks

Hundreds of projects are underway across the U.S. and perhaps thousands worldwide using citizen scientists. They're volunteers who collect information, usually in cooperation with professional scientists, in fields from computer science to medicine, ecology, outer space and beyond.

"The massive collaborations that can occur through citizen science allow investigations at continental and global scales and across decades — leading to discovery that a single scientist could never achieve on their own," says Scistarter, a website that tracks 1,600 research projects and is partly supported by the National Science Foundation and Arizona State University.

If you'd like to participate in citizen science in a simple but significant veterinary project at Cornell, save a tick removed from your cat — read about the growing threat of ticks in this issue — and send it to the Cornell Feline Health Center.

You could contribute to a greater understanding of the viruses, bacteria and parasites that ticks carry and that cause disease in cats and people in the center's Feline Tick/Lyme Disease Surveillance Program, says parasitologist Dwight D. Bowman, Ph.D., director of the program.

Scientists will identify the type of tick using visual and DNA based methods, and will test each tick to determine whether it carries *Borrelia burgdorferi*, the bacteria that causes Lyme disease.

To submit a tick, remove it from your cat and provide information described on www.cornell.edu/fhc under Research Studies. Place it in a sealed, zippered plastic bag and place that bag inside another sealed, zippered plastic bag. Send via overnight carrier or priority mail to:

FHC TICKS
Cornell University
C4-114 VMC
930 Campus Rd.
Ithaca, NY 14853-6401



You can participate in a Cornell study by sending a tick that was attached to your cat to the university's Feline Health Center for identification.

If the carrier requires a phone number, use (607) 253-3394. For more information, email fhticks@cornell.edu. General results of the study will be sent to participants in the spring as new samples are received.

An Enduring Mystery

Rather than the big breakthrough, the results of scientific studies often can indicate what's ineffective in treatment. That was the case when Craig Webb, DVM, Ph.D., at Colorado State University led a clinical trial of a diabetes mellitus treatment.

Our previous report noted that his team would evaluate the effects of a nutraceutical antioxidant. "Unfortunately, our study failed to demonstrate any clear benefit to cats," Dr. Webb says. "The fructosamine level (a serum protein test) in the treated cats did decrease significantly compared to the placebo control group, but this was most likely because the two groups — chosen randomly — were different to begin with. This is sometimes a problem seen in clinical trials where individuals are grouped randomly and there are important differences 'by chance.'"

Like other experts, Dr. Webb believes that oxidative stress — an imbalance in free radicals that can damage cells — plays a role, and that there may be a place for antioxidant therapy but says, "It is also likely that type 2 diabetic cats are different from type 2 humans and we just need to be smarter when it comes to figuring out this very complex process in this even more mysterious species!" ♦

Keeping Medicines Safe and Effective

Avoid storing them in sunlight, high heat and humidity, and label them for easy identification

When you pick up antibiotics at the veterinary clinic for your ailing cat, your handling, storage and disposal of the medication can go a long way toward improving his health, safety and the environment.

Risks of medicine-related calamities exist in every home with pets. They include accidentally mixing human and pet medications, exposing cats to flea topical flea preventives made for dogs and storing medications incorrectly in a manner that may reduce their effectiveness.

The Worst Location. Case in point: don't stash medicine for you or your cat in the bathroom cabinet. "It's one of the worst places to store medicine because the potency of many medicines is impacted by exposure to extreme environmental conditions – such as the heat and humidity generated by people taking hot, steamy showers," says Lisa Penny, director of pharmacy and a registered pharmacist

at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine.

"Also, don't leave your medicines or your cats' medicines on a kitchen counter or a shelf exposed to sunlight where they can get too hot and the cats can easily reach them."

Safer storage locations are dresser and nightstand drawers, closed kitchen cabinets and a shelf in an enclosed china cabinet.

Penny has been a pharmacist in human and veterinary medicine for 25 years. She shares her home with three dogs and two cats. All are on preventive medicines to keep them free of fleas and ticks. Each day, she gives vitamin supplements and anti-inflammatory pills to Mac, her 12-year-old Great Pyrenees.

Chewable Versions. Knowing that permethrin, an insecticide commonly found in canine flea and tick preventive topicals, can be highly toxic to her cats



Ask the veterinarian or pharmacist about special syringe stoppers that fit on top of bottles of liquid medicine. You can turn the bottle upside down and draw out the right dose without spilling.

if they are exposed to it, Penny purposely gives her three dogs a safer alternative: chewable versions. One reason: "If you apply topical flea and tick medications on your dogs, you are advised not to have your cat around them for 24 to 48 hours," she says. "Separating your dogs from your cats for that time can be challenging."

Also, consider the weight differences if the cats and dogs were together. "The flea and tick medicine I give my 130-pound Great Pyrenees would be a toxic overdose to my 9-pound cat, Lilly, because cats cannot tolerate permethrin, especially at that high dose," Penny says.

If you have a cat who loves to snuggle under the covers, don't fit him with a flea and tick collar containing medicine designed to last six months or more. "There are no studies out there, but logically, if a pet wearing such a collar snuggles under the covers, the person can be in contact with that topical insecticide during the entire night of sleep. Why take that risk?" Penny says. "However, if your cat sleeps at the foot of your bed on top of your bedspread, that is fine."

By law, any prescription medicine must be in a childproof container, but Penny knows that many people like the convenience of pill organizers to store daily amounts of pills and vitamins. Again, stash these organizers in

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HOW TO SAFELY DISPOSE OF MEDICINE

It's important to follow local laws on disposal of unused or expired medicine to minimize health risks. For starters, never flush them down the toilet because the medicine can impact your community's water supply, says Lisa Penny, director of pharmacy and a registered pharmacist at Cornell. "Also, drugs can be introduced into the environment and can make their way back into the food chain."

Instead, she offers these safe measures:

- ◆ Crush pills and mix them with kitty litter in a sealed bag and put it in the trash.
- ◆ Ask about medical "take-back" programs in your community. Hospitals, some veterinary clinics and community news bulletins often have information on the programs.
- ◆ Follow guidelines on disposing of needles and syringes. Some syringe containers can be sealed and delivered to designated medical recycle centers.

"Remember, what you put in the environment eventually goes back into your body, so take the proper precautions," says Penny.

HOARDING...*(continued from cover)*

as 250,000 animals are reported in the U. S., with cases doubling in the past four years, according to the Animal League Defense Fund. Experts credit the increase to greater public awareness and wider cooperation by law enforcement, humane societies, social services and mental health agencies.

Identifying an animal hoarder can be difficult because some isolate themselves, while others may be viewed as champions of homeless pets. Some tend to be overwhelmed by a large number of animals but often will ask for help. Others see themselves as rescuers, but fail to recognize their failure to provide adequate care. They are resistant to help, often hostile to authorities, and will undermine attempts to improve the situation. Still others are exploit hoarders, collecting animals to breed and sell them.

Randy Lockwood, Ph.D., senior vice president for Anti-Cruelty Initiatives and Legislative Services for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Ani-



The ASPCA said it found an overwhelming situation at a cat sanctuary in Western Pennsylvania, where more than 400 cats were living on the first floor of a commercial building. Many were suffering from upper respiratory and eye infections and feline leukemia virus, and some were in critical condition.

mals, has been involved in animal hoarding for more than 30 years. "I've found that hoarding cases tend to be an interesting but strange juxtaposition of people thinking they are helping animals, but in actuality, are killing them with kindness."

As it turns out, animal hoarding is a complex mental disorder challenging to

diagnose and treat, and difficult to stop due to a nearly 100 percent recidivism rate. Professionals from various agencies are increasingly sharing information about hoarding, Dr. Lockwood says.

"This is critical because animal hoarders can be mobile, and if they feel threatened, they often move to a neighboring town

CORNELL TEAMS TRIAGE HOARDING CASES

As part of their training, veterinary students at Cornell's Shelter Medicine Program participate in medical teams to treat and rescue animals in hoarding cases. In November 2015, Dr. Elizabeth Berliner, Director of Maddie's Shelter Medicine at Cornell, and her students worked with the SPCA of Tompkins County and other agencies in Newfield, N.Y., where three animal remains were found, and 28 dogs, cats, and small mammals were found inside a single-wide trailer.

The Cornell team worked closely with SPCA officials and provided triage, documentation and veterinary management of the animals in this case. Five years earlier, the owners had been found guilty of hoarding 100 animals in similar circumstances in Caroline, NY.

The veterinary team follows health and safety protocols by wearing heavy gloves, masks, respirators and knee-high boots. Animals are quickly triaged based on their levels of need. Humane restraint equipment is used, including catch poles, transport cages and humane traps to safely remove scared or potentially aggressive animals.

"We can use humane traps for under-socialized cats," Dr. Berliner says. "We set the humane traps in the home and then return within hours to retrieve the cats inside these traps. The use of nets is not successful on these cats as many tend to be feral, and we absolutely do not want to endanger the people retrieving the animals. It takes a team and we are fortunate to have this collaboration between the college and the SPCA in our community."



Many communities provide "harm reduction," limiting the number of pets that hoarders can have and carefully managing and monitoring them, says Elizabeth Berliner, DVM, MA, ABVP, director of the shelter medicine program at Cornell.

or the next state. We are much better at sharing information when we hear that a hoarder has moved."

The big difference between OCD and hoarding is the level of insight in the individual. "People with OCD perform certain compulsive rituals that they are often aware of and uncomfortable with and OCD is relatively treatable," Dr. Lockwood says. "However, a prime characteristic of a hoarder is the lack of insight. These are people who otherwise function at high levels and can be highly educated, but don't seem to realize the harm they are doing to animals."

When you go into a hoarder's home and see the clutter and presence of dead animals, you wonder why they can't see it or smell it, Dr. Lockwood says. "Denial is a big part of this condition. You see the conflict of a person wanting to care for animals, but the animals in their care are dying and the only way for this person to reconcile this is denial."

Effect on Health. Far more evident is the medical and emotional toll on cats and other animals. "Last year, we were part of a team that investigated a hoarding case in a single-wide trailer," Dr. Berliner says. "It was shocking. The floors

were soaked with fecal matter and the air was unbreathable. We wore masks, rubber boots, other personal protective gear. While it is hard to fathom how a person can live in this environment, what is more striking was that these poor animals had no choice."

Specifically, cats rescued from hoarding situations often suffer from one or more of these medical conditions, Dr. Berliner says:

- ◆ **Chronic respiratory conditions**, including calicivirus, feline herpes, and pneumonia
- ◆ **Skin conditions**, including flea and mite infestation, ringworm, lice, mange, infected open sores, urine scalding, and overgrown nails
- ◆ **Gastrointestinal conditions**, including diarrhea from parasites such as worms, giardia and coccidia
- ◆ **Nutritional conditions**, up to and including starvation

"Cats in these hoarding situations incur diseases of neglect and poor husbandry," says Dr. Berliner. "Sadly, some animals we find are dead. Others are in such bad condition that they need to be euthanized. And those we are able to save

are usually under socialized. They may be socialized toward other animals, but not to people. They can be hard to re-home."

Individuals who adopt a cat who has been hoarded need to have realistic expectations about their level of interaction with them. "Shelters need to be sure the people who adopt them know their situations and are committed to keeping them physically and behaviorally healthy," Dr. Berliner says. "We can sometimes help these animals overcome their socialization issues and fears of people — or we need to give them the space they require to live a quality life in whatever setting we determine to be more appropriate."

Public Policy. Animal hoarding task forces are being created at community and statewide levels. Mental illness plays a big role, so criminal prosecution is not always the most effective approach, Dr. Berliner says. "When animal hoarders are prosecuted, it is usually under anti-cruelty statutes."

Many communities are providing more of a "harm reduction" approach by offering assistance to animal hoarders with a limited number of pets who are carefully managed and monitored over the long-term, Dr. Berliner says. "This requires cooperation between human health providers, housing services and humane investigation units to be successful and guarantee that the animals are provided proper care and kept to a reasonable number." ♦

'DO NOT TRY TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM ON YOUR OWN'

Here are signs that may indicate a person is an animal hoarder, according to the Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium from Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, which gathered early research on the subject:

- ◆ The home is cluttered and may have holes in the walls and broken windows.
- ◆ The floors are caked with dried feces, urine and vomit.
- ◆ The animals inside are emaciated, lethargic and not well socialized.
- ◆ Fleas and vermin are present.
- ◆ The individual is isolated and appears to be in neglect himself.
- ◆ The individual insists animals are happy and healthy.

If you suspect a person is hoarding animals, contact your local animal humane investigator or law enforcement agency. "It takes someone calling attention to the problem to get it solved," says Elizabeth Berliner, DVM, MA, ABVP, director of the shelter program at Cornell. "Do not try to solve the problem on your own because it is very complex and requires concerted efforts among various agencies."

TO LEARN MORE:

These sites have information about animal hoarding:

- ◆ Animal Legal Defense League at www.aldl.org
- ◆ Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium at www.vets.tufts.edu/hoarding
- ◆ ASPCA at www.asPCA.org/animal-cruelty/animal-hoarding/closer-look-animal-hoarding.

TICKS ... (continued from cover)

and lose appetite. The protozoal infection prevents blood flow to tissues, resulting in multiple organ failure.

Cats who develop cytauxzoonosis “go down really fast,” says Cornell parasitologist Dwight D. Bowman, Ph.D. Even with treatment, cats can die within a week of infection. The mortality rate is often greater than 50 percent. “There are studies showing that cats die within days of the tick bite,” Dr. Bowman says. Infected cats cannot spread the deadly disease to humans or other cats or dogs.

Despite its name, bobcat fever affects domestic cats as well as bobcats and mountain lions. Bobcats appear to be the main reservoir for the disease, hence the name.

Cytauxzoonosis may develop from five to 20 days after exposure, so note it on your calendar if you find a tick on your cat. Outdoor cats are at highest risk, especially if they live in rural or wooded areas

where ticks thrive. City kitties are less prone but not immune from the threat.

The only treatment is a cocktail of antiparasitic and antibiotic drugs, plus aggressive supportive care such as IV fluids and a feeding tube for nutritional sustenance. Some cats may need oxygen or blood transfusions.



Ticks that carry *C. felis* are the Lone Star Tick (*Amblyomma americanum*), which is considered the predominant carrier of the disease, and the American Dog Tick (*Dermacentor variabilis*). These ticks are found in Southeastern and South-Central states such as Arkansas, Florida, Oklahoma



Ticks don't jump on a passing animal or human. They climb onto blades of grass or tall weeds and grab animals and humans. The American Dog Tick, at the left, and the Lone Star Tick predominantly transmit cytauxzoonosis to cats. The ticks are found in the Southeast and as far as the Atlantic coast and North Dakota.

THE TROUBLE WITH TICKS

Cornell parasitologist Dwight D. Bowman, Ph.D., and other experts say that ticks extending their range remain viable throughout the year in many parts of the country. While cats typically don't directly transmit tick-borne illnesses to humans, if your cat is exposed to ticks, you are, too.

The kind of tick that attaches to your cat depends on where you live:

- ◆ **In the Northeast:** Deer, or black-legged, ticks (*Ixodes scapularis*) can spread *anaplasmosis phagocytophilum* and *ehrlichiosis* to cats. Despite its name, the brown dog tick doesn't discriminate and may also feed on cats and transmit *ehrlichiosis*.
- ◆ **South:** Cats are at the greatest risk from the Lone Star Tick (*Amblyomma americanum*) and the American Dog Tick. Both transmit the potentially fatal cytauxzoonosis. They may also encounter the same ticks and tick-borne diseases found in the Northeast. You can identify the Lone Star Tick by the bright white spot on its back.
- ◆ **Upper Midwest:** You can expect to see the same ticks and tick-borne diseases found in the Northeast. Cytauxzoonosis is also a threat to cats in this region.
- ◆ **West Coast:** Cats may acquire anaplasmosis from black-legged ticks. Those in the Pacific Northwest may also encounter the American Dog Tick, which carries cytauxzoonosis.

Cats are safest from these diseases if they live indoors. Those who go outdoors should receive a routine tick preventive year-round or wear a breakaway tick collar. It's a myth that cats don't get ticks and don't need protection from them. That belief may stem from the possibility that cats groom ticks off themselves more quickly than dogs or that ticks are hidden in the feline fur coat.

“Tick preventives can be either monthly spot-ons, such as Frontline Plus or Revolution, or a tick collar such as a Seresto collar that lasts for eight months,” Dr. Miller says. “It is also important to brush your cat and look for ticks to remove manually if he goes outdoors, particularly in warmer months.”

Some preventives repel ticks or kill on contact. With others, the tick dies only if it bites the cat. “Seeing a tick on your pet does not necessarily mean the preventive isn't working,” Dr. Miller says.

Talk to the veterinarian about the best choice for your cat.

SAFE TICK REMOVAL: NO MATCHES, PLEASE

You may have heard tales about how to remove ticks. Ignore them. Never try to burn off the tick by applying a hot match or a lighted cigarette; you are likely to burn your cat. Other ineffective techniques include covering the tick with Vaseline or mineral oil. These methods are messy at best, injurious at worst. They may even cause the tick to release more bacteria or protozoa into the bite site.

If you can't face removing the tick, take your cat to the veterinarian and let a professional do it. Otherwise, start by putting on gloves to protect your skin from possible infection if the tick bursts. With tweezers or a special tick removal device, grasp the tick close to the skin and tug firmly. Place the tick in a sealed container filled with alcohol to kill it. Avoid flushing live ticks down the toilet; they have air sacs that allow them to survive in water.

After removing a tick, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water. Apply antiseptic to the area where your cat was bitten, and give him a treat to take away the sting.

and Texas, but that's not the limit of their range. They are seen as far east as the Atlantic coast and as far north as North Dakota.

"The trouble is *Amblyomma americanum* is definitely moving north," Dr. Bowman says. "We know that for a fact. So it is becoming much more common."

Lyme disease is the most common tick-borne illness. It's seen primarily in humans but is also known to affect dogs. The disease, which is transmitted by spirochete bacteria through the bite of a tick, causes joint inflammation, kidney disease, appetite loss and lethargy. It's not known for certain if cats can get Lyme disease.

We don't have a clear answer, but there are reports of cats with Lyme-like symptoms responding to treatment for Lyme disease.

Ticks can also carry *Mycoplasma spp.*, a blood parasite that can cause severe anemia in cats. Other potential pathogens that can be passed by a tick bite include *Ehrlichia spp.* and *Bartonella spp.*

Mycoplasma, formerly known as *haemobartonella felis*, is transmitted by the bite of an infected tick but can also be transmitted from mother cat to kittens or from one infected cat to another during a fight. It's also possible infected cats could transfer the disease to humans through bites or scratches.

In cats with feline leukemia or feline immunodeficiency virus and even some healthy cats, mycoplasma can cause severe and occasionally fatal hemolytic anemia. *Ehrlichia* and *Anaplasma* transmitted by ticks can cause disease in cats, but little else is known about their effect on felines. Cats with *Ehrlichia* or *Anaplasma* may have a fever, seem lethargic, lose their appetite and weight, suffer joint pain or have vomiting and diarrhea. Treatment with antibiotics may resolve these signs. ♦

MEDICATION ... (continued from page 3)

a drawer or enclosed shelf to prevent a curious cat from accessing them.

"Yes, there are childproof containers, but nothing exists in life that is truly pet proof," she says. "And if your pet vomits after receiving medication, do not re-medicate him. Call the veterinarian. The same applies if you are not sure if your pet swallowed one of your pills. Sometimes, inducing vomiting is the right thing to do and sometimes it is not, which is why you need to call the veterinarian right away."

If owners want to split medications in advance to fit pill organizers, they should know some medications should be left whole. "Always check with the veterinarian or registered pharmacist," Penny says. "In addition, splitting a dose to save money is never a good idea. The dose prescribed is what is needed to treat the condition. If cost is a challenge,

some companies offer online rebates or discounts, or ask a registered pharmacist."

Choice of Compounding. In choosing the form of the medication, Penny says some feline medications to treat hyperthyroidism or infections can be made more palatable by compounding pharmacies that add meat or fish flavoring that do not detract from the medicine's potency. Ask your cat's veterinarian or pharmacist about special syringe stoppers that fit on top of bottles of liquid medicine. These enable you to turn the bottle upside down and draw out the right dose into the syringe without spilling.

If your cat is on antibiotics and seems to be completely healthy, give him the entire dose. Do not stop halfway through the course of the prescription and think you can save these antibiotics for the next

flare up, Penny says. "You don't want to unintentionally create antibiotic resistance in your pet."

If your cat is diagnosed with diabetes and requires insulin injections, Penny stresses the importance of not trying to save money by re-using the needles or syringes. "There is a concern of infection development if you re-use syringes, and every time you use the needle, it gets a little duller and a dull needle hurts more. And never use insulin beyond its expiration date, as it becomes less effective."

Her final tip: use visual markers to easily identify your medicine and your cat's. Prescription bottles from Cornell feature images of cats and dogs. You can go a step farther by placing something brightly colored like neon orange duct tape on the top of the bottles and always store medicine for your cat separately from yours. ♦

MEDICINE



Elizabeth

Elizabeth is thankful for the assistance of the Cornell Feline Health Center in providing the answer on this page.

The Essentials of a Long, Happy and Healthy Life for a New Kitten

Q We've recently acquired a new kitten and want to make sure that we do all we can to give her a long and happy life. With so much information available, I wonder if you can give me a quick rundown of the things you feel are most important to assure that our baby has the best chance to live a long and happy life.

A First, thank you for taking this new kitty into your life. I am sure that with a few pointers, you will have her with you for a long, happy time. There are some basic things that may seem like common sense, but that can be very helpful for owners to be proactive about with respect to assuring the well-being of their kitties.

The first recommendation is to have your kitty examined by a veterinarian as soon as possible after acquiring her. This is important to make sure that no congenital diseases are present, that she is free of intestinal parasites (i.e., worms) and ectoparasites (i.e., fleas and ticks) to begin providing appropriate preventive care and to take advantage of the veterinarian's expertise with issues such as feeding, grooming and behavior.

After your kitty has received the initial series of vaccines, it is generally recommended that you take her to the veterinarian annually for a well care visit until the age of 10 years, after which she should be taken twice yearly for checkups.

A very important component of these early visits to the veterinarian is the administration of vaccines to provide protection against infectious diseases. All cats should be given the appropriate course of vaccines for feline panleukopenia, feline herpesvirus, feline calicivirus and rabies (these are considered "core" vaccines). Others may benefit from additional vaccines for feline leukemia virus and feline immunodeficiency virus, depending upon a number of factors that influence their risk for these viral diseases.

Your cat's veterinarian is best equipped to provide counsel about the necessity for these

additional vaccines. Vaccines most commonly require regular boosters at varying intervals, and it is important that you follow the veterinarian's advice regarding vaccine boosters.

It will be important for you to feed your kitty a nutritionally complete and balanced diet for whatever stage of life she is in (i.e., kitten versus adult), to always provide access to clean water, to provide her with a clean litter box and to monitor her elimination to make sure that she does not have diarrhea, bloody stools, overly dry stools or excessive or decreased urination. Monitoring her appetite, weight and activity level is also important, as abnormalities in any of these may signify a problem.

Your kitty should be kept indoors and should be provided with appropriate places to scratch (i.e., a scratching post), to play and climb (such as a kitty condo), and to retreat to for quiet times and sleeping. Taking 15 minutes per day to play with her with an appropriate feather or other kitty-appropriate toy will also be great for her psychological well-being and for your relationship with her.

Making sure she does not have access to common household toxins, such as antifreeze, acetaminophen (Tylenol), various plant species such as poinsettias, lilies and tulips; and to foreign objects that she can ingest and bite into, such as string, holiday tree garland, chicken bones and electrical cords, is also very important.

As she ages, management changes such as placing litter boxes with low sides (easier for arthritic kitties to step into) in easily reachable places, providing ramps for access to different levels in your house and providing a warm, soft place to rest will make those golden years that much more pleasant.

This list is not comprehensive. Please talk with your cat's veterinarian about more specifics, but if you follow these simple guidelines, you will be going a long way toward maximizing both the duration and the quality of your time together. ♦

—Sincerely, Elizabeth

PLEASE SHARE YOUR QUESTIONS

We welcome questions on health, medicine and behavior, but regret that we cannot comment on prior diagnoses and specific products. Please write CatWatch Editor, 535 Connecticut Ave., Norwalk, CT 06854-1713 or email catwatcheditor@cornell.edu.

COMING UP ...

❖
SPRAYING

❖
ADOPTING
A STRAY

❖
INJECTION SITE
SARCOMAS

❖
WASPS, BEES,
SKUNKS

CORRESPONDENCE

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