

Wheatland Animal Hospital

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On behalf of the doctors and staff, we would like to welcome you to Wheatland Animal Hospital. Our hospital is accredited by the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA). You may also visit our website at www.wheatlandanimalhospital.com

BEHAVIOR

Environmental Enrichment

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) recommends keeping cats indoors in suburban and urban environments. Indoor cats thrive when they have a predictable routine, ways to avoid stressful situations, and are able to express their natural behaviors such as: scratching, climbing, chewing, and playing. Below are some ways that we can help provide them with an optimal environment.

-Physical Space: Ideally, cats should have access to 1-3 meters of both horizontal and vertical space. Most cats prefer to rest in areas that they feel safe and secure since they are most vulnerable when sleeping. Creating a “refuge” space for them that is safe and comfortable can provide them with a retreat when they want to rest. This space should have food, water, and any other “essentials” readily available.

-Scratching: All cats have a natural instinct to scratch, even if they have been declawed. Scratching posts provide cats with a healthy outlet for this behavior. Most cats prefer posts made out of rough material that they can shred. Scratching posts or boards should ideally be placed along preferred routes in the home (often in the middle of a room rather than in the corner of a room or isolated areas) or near resting areas since this is typically a marking behavior. Praising your cat for using the appropriate scratching outlets can help reinforce this behavior and make them less likely to scratch or climb on other items in the house. Once your cat reliably scratches on the scratching post or other desired area, you may gradually move it to a location (no more than 3” per day) that is more suitable for your lifestyle.

-Climbing and Perching: Perches are helpful for cats to feel safe and allow them to explore their environment. Many cat trees provide an appropriate outlet for both climbing and perching. You can also place a couch, chair, or table in front of a window as a form of perching enrichment so they can look outside.

-Chewing: Providing cats with cat grass or fresh catnip can be a good outlet for their natural chewing behaviors, but be sure to keep houseplants out of reach.

-Play: Playtime is a great way to bond with your cat, improve their behavior and health, and increase their quality of life. The natural play form for cats is predatory in nature and includes: stalking, chasing, pouncing, and biting. Therefore, playing with human hands should be avoided. Appropriate outlets for play include: wand toys, balls, battery-operated toys that mimic prey, and catnip toys. Laser pointers may provide your cat with activity but can sometimes be distressing since they aren't ever able to capture the "prey" during these play sessions.

Vet Visits

Since visits to the animal hospital will be necessary for both annual wellness visits and when your cat isn't feeling well, making these visits as stress-free as possible is very important. While the visit itself can sometimes be stressful, many cats begin feeling stressed prior to arriving at the hospital. Taking the following steps can make all aspects of a visit to the vet less stressful for your cat.

-Handling: Getting your cat used to handling can decrease the stress of the physical exam itself. Gradually introducing handling of their paws, ears, and face at home can make the exam a more positive experience for them and can also make routine home care (nail trimming, tooth brushing, etc.) less stressful.

-The Carrier: One of the most helpful components in making visits less stressful is getting your cat used to the carrier prior to appointments. Leave the carrier open and sitting out so that it can be explored at your cat's own pace. You can also place bedding, catnip, or food/treats in the carrier to entice this exploration. Carriers can even be left out permanently as a bed or hiding place.

-Car Rides: Simply placing a treat in the carrier and driving around the block a few times can help your cat become more comfortable with car rides. When in the car, keep the stereo volume low, roll up the windows (too much road noise can frighten them), and turn on the air vents – never put your cat in a hot car or leave them unattended.

-The Hospital: When at the hospital, we will do our best to make the visit as positive as possible. Utilizing an exam room that is only used for cats as well as providing environmental enrichment (areas to climb and access to toys) in addition to minimizing wait times in the lobby are some of the ways that we strive to make this a positive experience for your cat. Bringing high value treats from home can also be beneficial. After visits to the clinic, make sure that your cat's safe "refuge" space is available to help them unwind.

Litter Boxes

Most cats prefer unscented, finely particulate litter for elimination. It is recommended that litter boxes are open and large (at least 1.5x the length of the cat). The minimum number of litter boxes in the home should be equal to the number of cats in the home plus one additional. They should also be available on each floor of the home and in a quiet, safe location. Litter boxes should be scooped daily, have the entire litter contents emptied weekly, the box washed monthly with mild dish detergent, and replaced annually. Litter boxes with high sides are beneficial for cats that often scatter a large amount of litter when they dig in the box, while litter boxes with low sides can be helpful for small kittens or senior cats that may have difficulties getting in/out of the box.

Food and Water

By nature, cats typically feed in repeated cycles of solitary hunting and eating. Therefore, they often prefer to eat from separate bowls that are out of sight of other cats. They also prefer to drink water away from their food and often won't drink at meal times. Some cats do well when they have free access to food, while others will eat more than the appropriate portion. For cats that tend to overeat when being free fed, automatic feeders can be utilized to feed 4-5 times daily. For active cats, food dispensing toys can increase mental and physical activity while also providing them with their meals. Some cats may have a preference for drinking running water and providing a flowing water bowl or fountain can be helpful to entice them to drink water.

Unwanted Behaviors

It is important to know that cats do not respond well to punishment or force and respond best to praise. Punishment that follows an action by more than a few seconds won't stop them from repeating the behavior again and may even cause them to be afraid of you or their surroundings. If you catch your cat engaging in an unwanted behavior, a noise distraction may stop the behavior without the cat associating it with you. Sometimes cats can play a little too hard and may scratch or bite. To teach your cat to inhibit this inappropriate style of play, you can leave the area when they are not playing nicely. If your cat tends to jump on surfaces that you would like them to avoid, you can try using sticky tape, foil, citrus scent, or an upside-down carpet runner.

VACCINATIONS

There are several contagious diseases which your kitten is susceptible to that can cause illness. Your kitten can be protected through proper immunization. Your kitten should be vaccinated for the following diseases:

- **Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis (FVR):** this is a herpes virus infection that causes severe upper respiratory disease in cats. FVR is not the same virus that causes infections in people. FVR is very contagious and is spread by contact with infected animals or can be spread via inanimate objects which have been exposed to the virus. Cats can become asymptomatic carriers. Treatment is limited to symptomatic care. The best prevention is through proper vaccination, which should be given three times as a kitten, a booster given at 1 year old and then can be boosted every three years thereafter.
- **Panleukopenia (P):** this virus can be deadly amongst kittens. The virus is spread through direct contact with an infected animal, or its saliva, urine, feces, or other bodily fluids. Panleukopenia can be carried by many wildlife species, including raccoons. The virus can live in the home for one year and is resistant to many disinfectants. Signs of Panleukopenia include fever, loss of appetite, vomiting, depression, severe diarrhea, and dehydration. The best prevention of this disease is proper vaccination, which should be given three times as a kitten, a booster given at 1 year old and then can be boosted every three years thereafter.
- **Calicivirus (C):** Calicivirus is another upper respiratory disease that is highly contagious and very common. Calicivirus is contracted in the same manner as FVR. Signs of Calicivirus are similar to those of FVR with the addition of significant mouth ulcers. The best prevention is through proper vaccination, which should be given three times as a kitten, a booster given at 1 year old and then can be boosted every three years thereafter.
- **Feline Leukemia (FeLV):** Feline leukemia is a viral disease of the immune system that in severe cases can cause death. FELV can only be transmitted via direct contact either by biting or copulation. FELV is endemic amongst outdoor cats. Cats that live in multiple cat households, catteries, or go outside should be vaccinated for FELV. The first vaccine should be given at 12 weeks and boosted at 16 weeks. If your kitten may be at risk, discuss vaccination with one of our veterinarians.

The vaccination schedule for your kitten should be as follows:

6-8 weeks of age.....FVRCP

10-12 weeks of age.....FVRCP & FeLV

16 weeks of age.....FVRCP, FeLV & Rabies

Additional Recommended Tests and Services:

Feline Leukemia (FeLV)/ Feline immunosuppressive virus (FIV) Test: FeLV and FIV are both serious viral diseases which your kitten can contract from its mother or by other routes before you acquire your kitten. It is important to test all kittens to ensure that their immune systems are healthy. All kittens are vaccinated for FeLV and your veterinarian will help you to decide whether or not to vaccinate your cat for FeLV as an adult. Wheatland Animal Hospital does not recommend vaccinating against FIV. If you are concerned that your cat may be at risk feel free to discuss it with one of our veterinarians.

Microchipping: Microchipping is a form of permanent identification for your cat and is a very helpful utility if he/she ever gets lost. The very small microchip (about the size of a long grain of rice) is placed under your cat's skin in the area between their shoulder blades. Once registered with the company (we will take care of the registration for you if your pet is microchipped at our hospital), the chip can be scanned by animal shelters or other animal hospitals nationwide and can greatly increase the chance of your cat being returned home. We always offer microchipping at the time of spaying/castrating but it can be performed at any regular appointment.

Spaying or Castrating (Neutering): There are many benefits to neutering your kitten. First and foremost is eliminating unwanted pregnancies and litters. If you have a female kitten, spaying her before her first heat will drastically reduce her chances of developing mammary cancer and eliminate her chances of developing uterine or ovarian cancer. It will also eliminate the chance of her developing a potentially life-threatening uterine infection. If you have a male cat, the risk of testicular cancer is eliminated and the chances of developing prostatic abscesses are drastically reduced. In addition, it may help control marking or roaming behaviors. We typically recommend neutering around 4-6 months of age, but this can be discussed further with your veterinarian.

PARASITES

Heartworm

Heartworms are a life-threatening parasite transmitted by mosquito bites than cause severe respiratory distress within approximately 4 months. Since mosquitos are the vector for this disease, even indoor cats are at risk for contracting heartworms. Heartworm disease is not treatable in cats, but is easily prevented. For these reasons, it is recommended that all cats receive monthly heartworm prevention year-round. Wheatland Animal Hospital recommends the use of Revolution for heartworm preventative. Revolution also provides monthly protection against fleas, intestinal parasites, and ear mites.

Fleas

Fleas can parasitize many mammals including: dogs, cats, rabbits, opossums, and raccoons. The nature of the flea lifecycle puts all cats at risk for potential exposure. Fleas mate on a parasitized animal and drop eggs in the environment (inside the house, in the yard, etc.). If we or our animals tread through these areas, it is very easy to bring flea eggs into the home. Fleas multiply rapidly and can carry dangerous bacterial that can make cats or humans sick. Fleas are very difficult to eradicate, but easy to prevent. For these reasons, year-round flea prevention is recommended for all cats. Revolution (our recommended monthly heartworm preventative for cats) provides monthly flea protection in addition to heartworm, intestinal parasite, and ear mite protection.

(Go to the Zoetis website to learn more information about Revolution: <https://www.zoetis.com>)

Intestinal Parasites

There are several intestinal parasites that can infest your kitten and cause vomiting, diarrhea, or coughing. Most of these parasites are zoonotic, meaning they can affect humans and other animals in the home. Many cats come into contact with parasites in their environment but they can also be transmitted from their mother. In order to detect these parasites, we ask that you bring in a stool sample for a fecal centrifugation test. By performing this test regularly, we can detect early stages of the parasites and provide treatment before an infestation occurs to hopefully prevent your other pets or family members from contracting them. Monthly Revolution also provides monthly intestinal parasite prevention in additional to prevention of heartworms, fleas, and ear mites.

(Go to the Zoetis website to learn more information about Revolution: <https://www.zoetis.com>)