

## HOME CAT CARE IN A NUTSHELL

By

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What do you do when you have a kitty that is chronically ill, or suddenly develops a disease that requires constant care? Don't panic, relax and have the confidence that you can see the situation through making both you and kitty comfortable in this trying time. With veterinary advice and loving home care, you and your kitty can develop a special bond.

First, be aware that your cat is probably very intuitive and can sense your stress and your calm levels. With a little knowledge of some basic cat care you can feel confident in providing for kitty's needs. In a state of calm instead of panic you can work more effectively with your veterinarian to achieve a better outcome no matter what the diagnosis.

This article will provide some home care tools for you, the kitty caretaker. These pointers will help you provide the care that your cat needs in the comfort of his or her home, while possibly even avoiding less visits and phone calls to kitty's already busy doctor. You will also learn how and what important information to present to the veterinarian on your office visits and in your telephone contacts.

Once you visit your veterinarian and receive a diagnosis, there are simple basics to caring for kitty at home. Of course, it is also very important to follow-up as instructed for diagnostic tests, bloodwork, and medication supervision as needed. Home care for kitty should be provided as diligently as it would be for any human family member.

A little guidance from a professional, goes a long way when you are at home caring for your pet. You do not need any special skills to provide home care for your cat. You just need to take a deep breath and say "kitty, I can do this and make us both more comfortable through this process of illness". Remember, your kitty will be aware of your new found confidence and this will enhance his or her relationship with you. And last, always ask your veterinarian then you are not sure or need guidance, and report any unusual symptoms or abnormalities you notice when caring for your cat.

### BASIC GUIDELINES

#### KEEP RECORDS

Keep a diary, in the form of a journal, and or a calendar in which you write daily details regarding medications, treatments and related symptoms. Monitor your cat's activity level, weight, appetite, and fluid intake. Is his or her temperature normal? Are bowel movements normal? Is there any vomiting? Does kitty appear nauseated (drools, no appetite)? When you talk with your veterinarian it is important to mention any abnormalities that exist.

## TEMPERATURE

Become familiar with what is a normal body temperature for your cat. Cat temperature varies from cat to cat, therefore one temperature does not fit all cats. To determine what the normal temperature of your cat is, take the temperature on three different days when not ill, and then average the three readings to determine what is normal. A second way to do this is to ask your veterinarian to give you the temperature reading from the veterinary record for three different visits when your cat was NOT ill. Cat temperature is generally taken with a rectal reading. You can pick up a digital thermometer at any pharmacy that registers in 15 seconds ( it is important to find a quick registering thermometer to make this a quick procedure for your little one). When you are ready to take the temperature, first apply a tiny amount of vasoline to the tip of the thermometer, you can easily cuddle your kitty on your lap and insert just the thermometer tip into the anus. Also available, are the newer and more expensive ear canal thermometers, however, according to veterinarians they are not found to be as accurate. For cats that have conditions that include fever and require frequent temperature checks, a quick way to know if your cat has a fever is to feel the ears. Although not as accurate as using a thermometer, if kitty has cool ears he probably does not have a fever. Holly, a Bach Flower Remedy which is made from the essence of the holly flower is easy to administer and has no side effects. It is recommended in situations where there is fever. It can be given by placing a few drops on the inner lip, or it can be rubbed into the ear tip or on the paw pad. Bach flower remedies can be purchased at any health food store or online. To find more on Bach flower remedies you can read online.

## RELAXATION-KITTY STRESS CONTROL

Should you have a kitty who does not like trips to the doctor, a product called Feliway, or Comfort Zone is available. This is a cat pheromone, and can be sprayed in the carrier before kitty enters to help him/her relax. Should your cat have to be hospitalized for any reason, bring this product and have staff spray the quarters where your cat will be residing. This has a very relaxing effect . There is also a Bach flower remedy, Rescue Remedy. This remedy is helpful with any if administered before travel , and can be used in any situation to reduce stress.

## RECORDING WEIGHT CHANGES

For the kitty who is not eating well, keeping a weight scale and a record of any weight gain or loss is imperative. To save frequent trips to your vet to monitor weight, the purchase of an appropriate scale can be helpful. The scale that you choose should measure not only in pounds, but also in ounces. Good choices are either a baby scale or a pet digital or analog scale that can be ordered online from a pet supply company. Most digital weight scales available for humans only measure in one half pound increments and are not precise enough to gauge your pets gain or loss.

## APPETITE ISSUES

When lack of appetite is an issue, one may try to entice your kitty with fresh poached chicken bits, chicken baby food, or canned tuna. To supplement fluids, try tuna juice or clam juice (available at the

market in bottle form). When your friend will not eat despite all of your efforts, be sure to keep your veterinarian apprised of the situation. Avoiding dehydration is critical! If kitty won't drink or eat on his/her own, you can help by supplementing with a syringe feeding. Your vet can supply you with a 5 cc syringe (no needle), which you can fill with slightly diluted chicken baby food, tuna or clam juice. Also available through your veterinary office are Hills AD, a high calorie soft food, and Clinicare a liquid formula designed to add nutrition for ailing cats.

When syringe feeding be sure to measure the amount that you are feeding and keep a daily record. Frequent small feedings are best. To feed, have your syringes filled and warmed to room temperature. Place kitty on your kitchen counter, and hold securely in your arms. Place the tip of the syringe into the side of the mouth and begin to feed slowly and give him a chance to swallow comfortably. Praise your kitty as you continue your feeding. This should be a comfortable bonding time for both of you.

#### AVOIDING DEHYDRATION

If your cat requires subcutaneous fluids (under the skin) to avoid dehydration, one trip to the doctor and a lesson on "how to" should prepare you for this task. Your pet doctor will also provide instruction on the need for fluids, and the amount and frequency that you should administer. First, be sure to wash your hands before you do your equipment set-up. An easy way to administer fluids at home is to have your equipment set up and ready to go before you pick up your little one. Hang your fluid bag on an upper kitchen cabinet knob securely (the bag needs to be at a higher elevation than your cat to have the fluid drip properly). Be sure that your fresh needle is securely in place and practice turning the fluid on and off as the veterinarian instructed you. Step two, is to place kitty on the kitchen countertop and cuddle him close to you. Let him know that you are not stressed, talk to him or her gently and reassuringly. If he feels that you are relaxed, this can and will be a simple procedure for both of you. Again, it is important that your kitty feels that you are relaxed and confident with any care you are providing.

#### DIARRHEA/CONSTIPATION

Sometimes diarrhea or constipation become a problem, often a resulting side effect of medications. Always report any elimination problem to your veterinarian. A home remedy that can aid with both diarrhea and constipation is to place a teaspoon of pure canned plain pumpkin into your cats' food.

#### CONCLUSION

The most important factor in caring for your cat is to monitor for any unusual factors, report to your vet, ask questions (be an advocate for your cats' needs), and follow all veterinary advice. Last, be prepared to provide comfortable home care as the situation warrants. Having the necessary items for home care such as a scale and a thermometer at home and readily available is a good start toward meeting your cats' needs in the comfort of his or her home.