

Puppy and Kitten Care: Your first trip to the veterinarian

Congratulations on the new addition to your family! Owning a puppy or a kitten can be a rewarding and fulfilling experience for everyone involved. However, it is a very large and potentially expensive responsibility as well. It will require dedication and commitment in maintaining the well-being and overall health of your new family member.

A good first step is to do some research online about the breed you have chosen – get to know a little about their temperament, developmental needs and potential breed-related illnesses that may affect them later in life. Ask yourself what you want in a pet before committing to a breed. Are you looking for a quiet companion or an active high-energy dog? It is important to be well educated when making this big decision so that you do not come to regret it in the future.

Here's what to expect from your first visit to the veterinarian:

Physical examination:

Upon your first trip to the veterinarian's office, a complete health assessment will be performed to see if your new pet has any diseases or congenital abnormalities. If not yet performed by the shelter or adoption facility an FeLV test would be recommended for new kittens.

Parasite control:

Puppies and kittens are predisposed to internal and external parasite infections. Fleas, ticks, heartworms and intestinal parasites can infest your new family member and make them sick. During your first visit your veterinarian will work with you to establish a detection, elimination, and prevention protocol to rid your pet of pests.

Vaccinations:

By vaccinating your pet, you will be preventing the spread of infectious and potentially life threatening diseases. Puppies and kittens have an increased susceptibility to diseases and they will require a series of three vaccine boosters initially. Your veterinarian will work with you to determine what kind of vaccine protocol will be most appropriate for your new pet. First vaccines are recommended around 6-8 weeks of age.

Identification:

All pets should have some sort of identification, whether it be a collar and a tag with your name and address on it or a microchip implanted underneath their skin. Thousands of pets get lost every year and without proper identification, many of them never make their way back home.

Spay and Neutering:

If you do not plan on breeding your pet, it is highly recommended to spay or neuter them. This will help them avoid potential behavioral and medical problems as well as reduce the rate of unwanted pregnancy and overpopulation. It is recommended that they are altered around 6 months of age (prior to reaching sexual maturity.)

Behavior counseling:

The most common reason a new pet is returned or surrendered to a shelter is due to behavior problems. Your new puppy or kitten may not be fully trained when you adopt them and so it will require a large time commitment from you and your family to encourage good behaviors. It may be frustrating, but it is imperative to teach these behaviors early in life to avoid difficulties as your new family member matures. Your veterinarian will work with you to discuss training and may recommend puppy obedience classes.

Nutrition:

Puppies and kittens have different nutritional requirements than their adult counterparts do. Your new pet will hit a growth spurt in the first 7 to 10 months of age and maintaining their daily caloric needs is a necessity. It is also important to accurately monitor the intake of your pet's food, otherwise they may be bound for obesity or malnutrition. Healthy snacks are encouraged (carrots, bananas, rice cakes, ice cubes, etc) and table scraps should be avoided.

Health Insurance:

Purchasing an insurance policy for your pet is a good option to consider when they are young. Policies typically provide reimbursement coverage for your pet's eligible diagnostics, surgeries, treatments, x-rays and prescriptions. It encourages owners to seek veterinary care earlier and helps the veterinary staff provide the care your pet may require.

The veterinarians and staff at Animal Medical Care look forward to working with you and your pets as they become an important part of your family!