



The Cooke Veterinary

The Place for Healing **Medical Center**

Kittens: Recommendations for New Owners

Congratulations!

We would like to congratulate you on the latest and greatest addition to your family! Owning a kitten can be an extremely rewarding experience, and it is also a large responsibility. We hope this handout will give you the information you need to make good decisions regarding your kitten.

The team at *The Cooke Veterinary Medical Center* would like to thank you for choosing us as your partner to protect your kitten's health. We always want to do our very best to help extend the life of our animal friends. There are many things that we can do in partnership with you to accomplish this. This document will provide key information to help you during the early stages of your kitten's life, as well all your kitten's life stages to come.

Steps to Ensure Long and Happy Life for Your Pet

A. Care Provided by Veterinarian:

- Routine Exams & Vaccines
- Annual Blood work
- Quality Spay/Neuter
- Dental Cleanings

B. Care Provided at Home:

- Healthy Diet
- Activity Level/Weight Control
- Heartworm/Flea/Tick Prevention
- Dental Health (Early at Home Prevention)
- Behavioral Training
- Being Watchful! Noticing subtle changes that can indicate your animal needs medical attention.

Why are yearly vet check-ups important for my cat?

Taking your cat to the veterinarian is not just reserved for when your cat is unwell. It is common for cats to be stoic and not give obvious outward signs of sickness/pain. Getting our kitties to the veterinarian can often be challenging, but there are important reasons for physical exams beyond routine vaccinations. These routine exams are critical to extending, and sometimes even saving, the lives of our beloved felines. It is during these examinations that potential problems can be identified. **Proactive prevention is key.**

Reasons for Veterinary Annual Physical Exams for Cats:

- **Listening to the heart to detect murmurs or abnormalities**
- **Listening to the lungs to detect respiratory problems**
- **Palpating the abdomen can reveal abnormal organs or tumors**
- **Feeling lymph nodes can indicate signs of illness**
- **Monitoring weight can signal early problems**
- **Scanning the body for undetected lumps and bumps**
- **Checking eyes for early onset of cataracts, glaucoma, or other ocular problems**
- **Discussion of skin, coat, diet, parasite control, and general body condition**
- **Examine gums which may indicate painful infection which can spread to other organs**

What about when my cat gets older?

We recommend bi-annual exams for cats of all ages, but as cats get older these exams become even more important to detect warning signs that may indicate developing disease processes. Regular exams can help detect and treat any age-related conditions that may occur.

Tips for Getting Your Cat to the Vet Office

Difficulty getting your cat to the vet? This is a common problem many clients experience. Cats often hide, are aggressive, vocalize, or exhibit stressed/fearful behavior when crated and transported. This can be stressful for both owner and pet. Often the "battle" of getting a cat to the vet office causes owners to become comfortable with skipping important annual physical exams for their cat.

Familiarize Your Cat with the Cat Carrier

Keeping the carrier visible in your home at all times helps acclimate the cat to its presence. The first step in getting your cat to use the carrier begins long before the trip to the vet. You need to familiarize your cat with the carrier slowly and gradually.

- Make sure the carrier has been thoroughly cleaned with hot water and vinegar.
- Start feeding your cat inside the carrier. Leave the door propped open, and place a bowl of tasty canned food at the very back. Don't force the cat in if he/she doesn't go in on their own. Patience is key here.
- Sprinkle catnip, or spray **Feliway**, on the bottom of the carrier, and toss a few toys inside. Ping pong or golf balls work well.
- Once your cat is comfortable going inside the carrier, close the door for about 5 minutes, then release your cat. Give your kitty a nice treat. Do this about twice a week. Increase his/her time of confinement, but never more than 10 minutes.

When should my kitten be vaccinated?

There are many fatal diseases that can afflict kittens. Fortunately, we can prevent several of these merely by vaccinating your pet. In order to be effective, these vaccines must be given as a series of injections. Ideally, they are given at about 8, 12, and 16 weeks of age, but this schedule may vary depending on your pet's individual needs.

The core vaccination schedule will protect your kitten from several common diseases: feline viral rhinotracheitis, calicivirus, panleukopenia and rabies. The first four are included in one injection that is given at 8, 12, and 16 weeks old. Rabies vaccine is given at 12 to 16 weeks of age.

How important is Feline Leukemia Vaccine?

Feline leukemia virus (FeLV) is one of the most common, destructive, and preventable cat viruses. It cannot be transmitted to people or other animals, but it is highly contagious cat to cat. FeLV suppresses the immune system and decreases resistance for other diseases making it one of the leading causes of feline deaths today.

Transmission- Cat to cat primarily through saliva.

Symptoms- No signs are specific to FeLV.

*Cats can have the feline leukemia virus for years before showing signs of disorders commonly associated with infection. Vaccination before exposure to the virus is the best means of protection (although no vaccine is 100% protective).

Diagnosis- Made by a positive blood test. Testing can be performed any time as a kitten, usually at their first visit. It is recommended that a 2nd test be performed 6 months after the initial test, and two months after if the first comes back positive.

Vaccinations- Started at 8 weeks old.

*We advise that all kittens receive the FeLV vaccine at 8 & 12 weeks of age and then a booster one year later. After that your veterinarian will advise if your pet should have continued vaccinations.

Why does my kitten need more than one vaccination?

During the first few weeks of nursing, a kitten develops maternal antibodies from its mother's milk. Vaccinations will provide long-lasting immunity. If the mother's antibodies are present, vaccinations do not have a chance to stimulate the kitten's immune system. The mother's antibodies interfere by neutralizing the vaccine. Since we don't know when an individual kitten will lose the short-term immunity, we administer a full series of vaccinations to ensure their protection.

How does The Cooke Veterinary Medical Center differ in terms of vaccinations given?

At this office we only administer necessary vaccines (also called core vaccines) based on patients' lifestyles or federal laws. We use non adjuvanted vaccines and we do not use any vaccines that do not have sufficient data to warrant safe routine use.

How serious are heartworms?

Feline heartworm disease has been diagnosed in all 50 states. Wherever dogs are considered at risk for heartworms, so too are cats.

Research has shown that signs such as coughing and difficulty breathing, which are often diagnosed as feline asthma or allergic bronchitis, can be caused by the presence of heartworms in either larval or adult stages.

Other Symptoms:

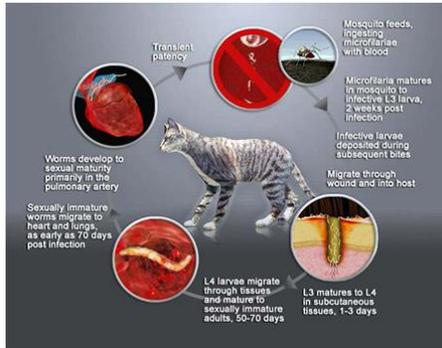
- Lethargy
- Rapid heart rate
- Decreased appetite
- Weight loss
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Collapse
- Sudden Death

***There is no easy treatment for feline heartworm disease, but it is easily prevented.**

Heartworms are important parasites to prevent, especially in our climate. They live in a cat's heart and cause major damage to the heart and lungs. Heartworms are transmitted by the bite of mosquitoes. Fortunately, we have medication that will protect your cat from heartworms. These medicines are very safe and effective if given correctly. Heartworm preventatives are dosed according to your cat's weight. As the weight increases, the dosage should increase.

Remember to:

- Note the dosing instructions on the package!
- Administer the whole dose (half or partial doses can be ineffective)
- Give heartworm prevention **every** month, year-round and life long.



The Importance of Spay/Neuter and The Cooke Veterinary Medical Center's Differences

Spay- It has been proven that as the female cat gets older, there is a significant incidence of mammary cancer and uterine infections if she has not been spayed. Spaying before she has any heat cycles will virtually eliminate the chance of either.

Neuter- Neutering will decrease typical male cat marking as well as helping to prevent aggressive behavior.

***As opposed to numerous surgeries jammed into a day at other hospitals, we intentionally schedule a limited number of surgeries each day. This allows our doctors and staff the time to closely monitor your pet before, during, and after their procedure. We offer "big gun" surgical techniques with state-of-the-art surgical facilities and advanced laser/diagnostic equipment and a no corner-cutting approach. This helps promote less traumatic/more successful surgeries with a faster healing time.**



What should I feed my kitten?

Not All Food Is Created Equal! There are lots of choices of kitten/cat food! Diet is **extremely** important during all stages of a cat's life. Investing in your cat's nutrition is an important step towards keeping them happy and healthy for many years to come. We advise a veterinary recommended name-brand food made by a national dog food company (not a generic or local brand) and a **diet specifically formulated for kittens** (or “**all life stages**”). Food labeled specifically for kittens should be fed until your kitten is about **12 -18 months** of age. Food high in grains, corn and meat by-products are not recommended. Often, a good selection of canned wet food mixed with dry food is ideal. Here are some recommended high quality pet foods:

- **Orijen** (hospital carried)
- **Innova EVO**
- **Wellness** (hospital carried)
- **Others-See “Five Star Cat Food List”**

See www.petfoodratings.net for complete details on different pet foods. The website above is unbiased and designed to help you pick the food that is right for you and your cat.

Though higher quality food can be initially more expensive, putting a little extra toward what you feed your cat can pay dividends over their lifetime and very possibly help them avoid serious, painful, and costly illnesses.

An increasing number of American Veterinary Medical Association members, including board-certified veterinary internists, are now strongly recommending the feeding of canned food instead of dry kibble.

What is the problem with dry foods?

The three key problems are:

- **Water content is too low.** Cats eating dry foods are chronically dehydrated and do not drink enough water to properly re-hydrate themselves.
- **Carbohydrate load is too high**
- **Higher plant-based proteins vs. animal-based proteins**

Common issues with a solely dry food diet

- **Diabetes**
- **Kidney Disease**

- **Obesity**
- **Urinary Tract Disease**
- **Gastro-Intestinal Disorders**
- **Cancer**

For more information on diet, The Cooke Veterinary Medical Center offers **nutritional consults** with our veterinarians to answer all your questions concerning types of foods ideal for your pet, home-cooked meals, raw diets, supplements and more. Call today to schedule your appointment.

How much food should be given?

There are several “right” ways to feed kittens. The most popular method is commonly called “meal feeding”. This means that the kitten is fed at specific times of the day. A measured amount of food should be offered four times per day for 5-12 week old kittens. What is not eaten within 20 minutes is then taken up. If the food is eaten within three to four minutes, the quantity is probably not sufficient. Kittens fed in this manner generally begin to cut back on one of those meals by 3-4 months of age and perhaps another one later. If a certain feeding is ignored for several days, it should be discontinued.

“Free choice feeding” means that food is always available. This works well with dry foods and for some cats. Other cats however may overeat and become obese, and therefore should not have constant access to food. If there is weight gain after the optimal size is reached, this method of feeding should be discontinued.

While dogs are omnivorous and able to break down and digest both vegetable and animal protein, cats are obligate carnivores, which means that they need muscle-based meats in their diets. Quality canned food is more like a cat’s natural diet in consistency, nutritional content, and caloric density. **We recommend you feed your cat a high-quality canned food primarily and you can add high quality dry food at the ration of 70% canned to 30% dry.** Rotating flavors in the brand you choose.

Weight Control

While they are kittens, **it is vital to understand the importance of weight control for your future adult cat.** An estimated 45% of all U.S. pets are overweight or obese according to the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention. While the best treatment is prevention, it’s never too late to help your pet stay in better shape.

***Obese animals have much higher incidence of arthritis, heart disease, diabetes, impaired reproductive ability, and greater risks with surgery and anesthesia. Research indicates that in both people and animals, increased weight shortens life span.**

If your animal is overweight there are usually painless methods for losing those unhealthy pounds. With careful dietary management, and oversight by your veterinarian, changes in diet and lifestyle can lead to a healthier and more productive life. Routine playtime combined with sensible feeding can avert the need for medical intervention.

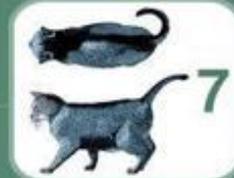
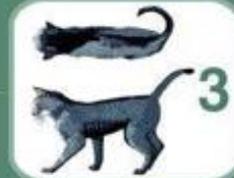
BODY CONDITION SYSTEM

- TOO THIN**
- 1** Ribs visible on shorthaired cats; no palpable fat; severe abdominal tuck; lumbar vertebrae and wings of ilia easily palpated.
 - 2** Ribs easily visible on shorthaired cats; lumbar vertebrae obvious with minimal muscle mass; pronounced abdominal tuck; no palpable fat.
 - 3** Ribs easily palpable with minimal fat covering; lumbar vertebrae obvious; obvious waist behind ribs; minimal abdominal fat.
 - 4** Ribs palpable with minimal fat covering; noticeable waist behind ribs; slight abdominal tuck; abdominal fat pad absent.

IDEAL

- 5** Well-proportioned; observe waist behind ribs; ribs palpable with slight fat covering; abdominal fat pad minimal.

- TOO HEAVY**
- 6** Ribs palpable with slight excess fat covering; waist and abdominal fat pad distinguishable but not obvious; abdominal tuck absent.
 - 7** Ribs not easily palpated with moderate fat covering; waist poorly discernible; obvious rounding of abdomen; moderate abdominal fat pad.
 - 8** Ribs not palpable with excess fat covering; waist absent; obvious rounding of abdomen with prominent abdominal fat pad; fat deposits present over lumbar area.
 - 9** Ribs not palpable under heavy fat cover; heavy fat deposits over lumbar area, face and limbs; distention of abdomen with no waist; extensive abdominal fat deposits.



Watch! - It is important to keep a watchful eye on your kitten/cat between routine exam visits!

Sometimes when your pet is under the weather, the signs are crystal clear. At other times, the symptoms can be overlooked and unfortunately our animal friends can't tell us when they are not feeling well. Hiding illness is a pet's natural survival instinct so it is up to the owners to keep a watchful eye on their companions.

See your veterinarian if you notice any of the following:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Blood or mucus in stool | Less interaction with family |
| Unusual lumps or bumps | Changes in sleeping pattern |
| Straining to urinate | Aggression toward people |
| Less enthusiastic greeting behavior | Bad breath |
| Coughing or sneezing | Unusual discharge |
| Gagging | Diarrhea |
| Listlessness/Weakness | Constipation |
| Lameness | Stiffness |
| Shaking of head | Difficulty with activity |
| Excessive scratching | Change in activity |
| Significant hair loss | Increased thirst |
| Tremors or shaking | Excessive licking |
| Altered appetite | Excessive barking |
| Confusion or disorientation | Scotching of rear |
| Needs too much attention | Destructive behavior |
| Pawing at abdomen | Gums pale, white or blue |
| Ear discharge/odor | Restless or pacing |
| Watery or sunken, dry eyes | Vomiting |
| Rapid weight loss or gain | Fearful |
| Lack of bowel movements | Tripping or limping |

Emergencies!

What is an emergency? Immediately contact your veterinarian or go to an emergency clinic if you observe any of the following signs/events:

Labored breathing, blue, white or very pale gums

Inability to walk

Collapse or loss of consciousness

Temperature over 104

Dizziness, imbalance, or circling

Temperature under 99

Signs of acute pain (crying out excessively)

Holding eye closed, winking

Extremely bloated abdomen

Bleeding, excessive

Seizures

Hit by car

The well-being of our patients is our number one priority and we would like to take the time to inform our clients what to do should they find themselves in need of emergency treatment for their pet.

****We do our very best to provide needed treatment to all of our patients during an emergency situation. However, depending on the severity of the emergency, the time of day, and our staffing schedule, it is difficult to guarantee that we can accommodate every emergency/trauma.**

Because some situation may require 24 hour monitoring that emergency hospitals are better equipped and better staffed to provide, (time permitting) we ask that you **call the office at 757-547-9421**, and speak to one of our knowledgeable licensed veterinary technicians to discuss the signs and symptoms your pet may be exhibiting. This will allow us to determine if the situation can be addressed at our center or if the pet needs to be immediately directed to an emergency hospital.

We recommend that you keep this list close by, perhaps on the refrigerator, for emergency or after-hours care:

Blue Pearl Virginia Beach (Independence Blvd): 757-499-5463

Bay Beach Emergency: (Nimmo Pkwy.) 757-340-3913

The Cove (Suffolk): 757-935-9111

Animal Poison Control: 1-888-426-4435 (\$65 per call)

What do I do if my pet ingests poison?

Your pet has just ingested something toxic; this includes household chemicals and chocolate. What do you do? First, take a deep breath. The more calm, cool, and collected you are, the sooner you can seek the correct medical attention.

- 1. Remove your pet from the area. Make sure no other pets or children are exposed to the area, and safely remove any poisonous material.**
- 2. Check to make sure your pet is breathing normally and acting fine otherwise.**
- 3. Collect a sample of material, along with packaging, vial, or container. You will need that information to help your veterinarian or a pet poison expert assess the situation.**
- 4. Do not give your cat any milk, food, salt, oil, or any other home remedies including hydrogen peroxide unless instructed by a veterinarian to do so. Doing so will likely complicate the poisoning.**
- 5. Never induce vomiting without talking to your veterinarian or pet poison expert first—doing so may be detrimental or contraindicated.**
- 6. Get help. Program your veterinarian's phone number into your phone, as well as an emergency veterinarian's number and a pet poison hotline number.**

*Remember that a pet's prognosis is always better when a toxicity is reported immediately, so don't wait to see if your pet becomes symptomatic before calling for help. Calling right away is safer for your pet and could help save additional expense on treatment costs in the long run. Remember that there's a narrow window of time to decontaminate in cases of poisoning.

Behavior

Relationship: A positive relationship with their owners is crucial to a cat's emotional well being. Discipline with a squirt bottle can alienate your cat and make it nervous around people. Now is the time for you to understand that cats **DO NOT** respond to force. Reprimands only work if you catch your cat "in the act." If you catch your cat making a mistake, it is better for you to create a distraction by making a loud noise that will attract its attention. With cats the best form of discipline is prevention, and every care should be taken to avoid "bad habits."

Here are some ideas to help keep your cat happy and comfortable:

Ensure scratching post are available

Provide toys for them to chase, allowing them some exercise

Have enough litter boxes and keep them clean in a quiet area

Give him/her their own space or quiet room

Provide climbing post, cats often feel more comfortable at higher elevation

A window available for them to look out of

Food and water should be placed away from litter box in quiet area

Bed should be placed away from litter box in quiet area

There is a little tiger in every house cat, a solitary predator, that needs to exercise its hunting skills on a regular basis. If these needs are not met, your cat may feel stressed, which can affect both health and behavior. Making your house more “cat friendly” will ensure that you and your new cat enjoy each other’s company for years to come.

Litter

Change litter regularly, as cats do not like using dirty litter boxes. They are very clean animals and appreciate clean toilet facilities as much as we do. Some cats prefer different types of litter. If your cat is used to one specific type of litter it is a good idea to stick to it. This will also prevent soiling in the home.

How many litter boxes? The general rule of thumb is one box for each cat plus one more. Then none of them will ever be prevented from eliminating in the litter box because it's already occupied.

Declawing

NO! Declawing is multiple amputations. It’s comparable to the removal of human fingertips at the first knuckle. Sensory and motor nerves are cut, damaged, and destroyed. Recovery from the surgery is a slow and painful process. This procedure can hamper the sensations and enjoyment involved in walking, running, springing, climbing, and stretching. Declawing is considered inhumane and **there are other alternatives, see “Behavior.”**

Without its #1 defense system many declawed cats’ resort to nipping or biting with very little warning. They often use oral means to express their insecurity and this may also result in destructive chewing problems.

Cat owners who elect to have their cats’ paws declawed generally do so with the belief that they will never have to deal with fabric damage due to destructive scratching problems. However, paw sensitivity resulting from the declaw operation may result in litterbox avoidance and urine-soaked furnishings or carpeting. If you are experiencing destructive behavior, we encourage you to make an appointment with your veterinarian to discuss your options.

Play-time

It is always a great idea to incorporate some playtime in your kitten's day. The use of interactive toys with the kitten should be used so it can learn to enjoy playtime with people. **You do not want the kitten to learn that hands and feet are plays toys**, so it is highly recommended to never tease a kitten with your hands or feet. If a kitten begins to make a habit of pouncing on legs when an owner is walking by, it is also recommended that you clap with your hands to startle the kitten and discourage that behavior immediately and consistently.



Importance of well visits/exams

One of the **most** important things you can do to help maintain the health of your pet is to take them to their bi-annual/annual exams with their veterinarian. These exams are all about prevention and catching problems early. Your veterinarian has special training and experience in detecting subtle illness in pets.

Listening to the heart can detect murmurs. Increased lung sounds may indicate early illness. Abdominal palpation may reveal pain in certain areas, abnormal size and shape of various organs or even tumors. Checking out the eyes can detect early signs of cataract or other ocular problems. Ears may need cleaning or medication. Dental disease may be detected as well as signs of allergies or skin problems.

It is easier for someone who doesn't see your pet every day to detect lumps and bumps that you may not have noticed. Comparing their weight histories can also determine if your cat is heading down the path to obesity or identify unexplained/unnoticed weight loss. As a cat reaches middle to old age, annual physical exams become even more important.

Exams also allow for client education on topics such as maintaining a good diet, feeding habits, heartworm & flea/tick prevention protocols, dental health, and behavioral problems, etc.



Importance of Annual Bloodwork

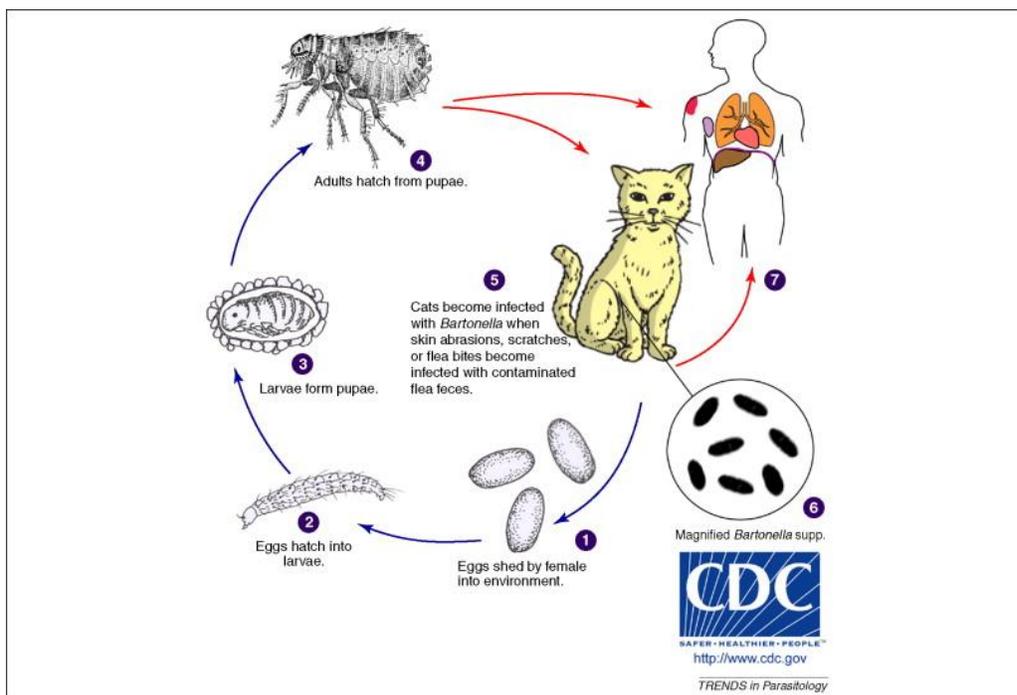
Annual blood work helps monitor liver and kidney function, red and white cell blood counts, and can help identify abnormalities that your pet may not be telling you about! Again, the importance of annual blood work is all about prevention and the early detection of any problems.

Blood and urine tests are extremely useful tools for looking at the overall health of your pet. From them, your doctor can learn if your pet is a diabetic, has kidney or liver disease, or an infection. If caught early, problems like these can be successfully treated or controlled, giving your pet a longer and better quality of life.

Importance of Flea/Tick Prevention

Fleas and ticks are tiny pests that can cause big problems, and the damage isn't just skin deep. Animals can ingest fleas containing tapeworm eggs, which then hatch in their intestines. In a flea-ridden area, the same thing can happen to a child.

Ticks can also carry a variety of diseases, which can be further transmitted to people! Risks vary by region, and the Tidewater area is a high-risk area so prevention is critical.



Kitten Visits Overview

Kitten Visit #1 7-8 Weeks	Kitten Visit #2 11-12 Weeks	Kitten Visit #3 15-16 Weeks	Kitten Visit #4 20 Weeks
Exam	Exam	Exam	Tech Appointment
FVRCP Vaccine #1	FVRCP Vaccine #2	FVRCP Vaccine #3	Heartworm & Flea Prevention
Felv/FIV Combo Test	Feline Leukemia Vaccine #1	Feline Leukemia Vaccine #2 Rabies Vaccine	
Dewormer	Dewormer	Dewormer	
Heartworm & Flea Prevention	Heartworm & Flea Prevention	Heartworm & Flea Prevention	
Fecal Exam #1 Parasite Check		Fecal Exam #2 Parasite Check	

****Please note that exams are needed prior to receiving vaccinations to ensure that your kitten is not showing any sign of illness or problems prior to injections.**

What to expect for vaccine reaction

The Cooke Veterinary Medical Center chooses vaccines based on recombinant technology that provides the least amount of vaccination reactions and it is uncommon to see problems with administration of vaccines. However, in rare instances, administration of vaccines may cause lethargy, fever, drooling, vomiting and /or diarrhea, or hypersensitivity.

****Please contact us right away if your pet experiences any of these signs.**

Although there may be an instance of a vaccine side effect, vaccination safety is generally quite high. Concerns and fears about adverse effects of vaccines should not be used as grounds to avoid immunizing your cat or dog. The diseases which these vaccines are protecting them from can be far more detrimental to the health of your pet than the risk of an adverse vaccine reaction.