

Guide for Cat Foster Homes

Top Tips for Foster Parents

- Check in regularly with your Foster Contact.
- Ask for advice if your cat/kitten has stopped eating.
- Kittens crash fast, so alert your Contact early if you see behavior changes.
- If your cat seems sick, check immediately for hydration – she should be drinking water, using the litter box, have elastic skin tone and a moist mouth.
- Never use clumping litter for kittens under six months of age.
- Wash your hands and change your shirt after handling sick animals to prevent spread of illness.
- Never let your cat run loose outside; guard against escapes.

Health & Wellness

URIs

Upper respiratory infections (URIs) are very similar to human colds. The cat is often congested and cannot smell her food. Tempting your foster cat with smelly canned cat food, Hills A/D food (purchased at a veterinarian's office), baby food (no onions or garlic in ingredients), chicken broth or even tuna in water (last resort as too much can cause diarrhea) will often get her eating again.

You may have to coax her to eat by using your fingers, and even smearing it on her lips or nose. If your foster cat has not eaten for more than two days, let your Foster Contact know – feeding her with a syringe may be necessary. If you don't know how to do this, we can describe this or show you how. Nutracal is a calorie- and nutrient-dense supplement that even sick cats will often accept when not otherwise eating. This can be picked up at the shelter.

Steam from a vaporizer or hot shower often helps clear the nasal passages. Keep the nose and eyes clear of discharge with warm, damp cotton balls. A cat who doesn't feel well appreciates some extra petting and quiet time in your lap. If you can coax your foster cat to eat, and she's drinking water, the infection will usually run its course and no additional treatment is necessary.

Dehydration

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Watch carefully to see if your foster cat is drinking water. You may have to monitor the level of the water bowl and keep track of litter box activity. You can check for dehydration by pulling the skin up just a little lower than the back of the neck. It should be taut and snap back down. If it stands up or takes some time to go back down, the cat may be dehydrated.

A lethargic cat is often dehydrated. If your cat is dehydrated, subcutaneous fluids may be necessary. This is a good skill to learn and you can be buddied up with an experienced foster parent who can teach you. Please contact us right away if you think your cat is dehydrated. We may arrange a home visit, direct you to the shelter for fluids or to one of the local veterinarians who bill the shelter directly.

If your foster cat is extremely lethargic, has a fever (over 103 degrees F, rectally, constitutes a fever), and/or a bacterial infection, let your Foster Contact know immediately.

If nasal discharge is thick and yellowish-green (vs. clear and watery), this may be an indication that a bacterial infection has set in, and antibiotics may be necessary. In this case, we will direct you on where to get the cat seen either by our shelter veterinarians or a local clinic.

Other Common Issues

Let your Foster Contact know if you notice any of these:

- Loose stool or diarrhea, usually caused by parasites that may or may not be visible in feces; these can sometimes be treated with wormer picked up at the shelter or a vet visit.
- Continual vomiting or occasional vomiting that lasts more than a day or two.
- Extreme lethargy for more than 2-3 days.
- Eyes that are red and inflamed or have an extreme amount of discharge and swelling, vs. small amounts of discharge, usually in both eyes (common with a URI). This can often be treated with eye ointment picked up at the shelter, but may need a vet visit if the infection doesn't respond within a couple of days.
- Any crumbly wax-like substance in the ears (possible ear mites). Ear mite medicine can be picked up at the shelter.
- Fleas or flea dirt (black pepper-like substance in the fur). Advantage is usually applied if fleas are noticed at the shelter. If you see flea dirt, we will find out if Advantage was already applied.

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→ **Checkout this resource on infection control in the home:**
ASPCApro.org/infection-control-foster-homes

Veterinary Visits

All vet visits must be pre-authorized unless you are willing to pay for the visit yourself. Check with your Foster Contact first.

We must be very cautious when deciding whether or not a foster animal needs to go to the vet, as office visits add up very quickly. Each case will be evaluated individually by what is best for the animal as well as economically feasible for the shelter. We do have two Shelter Veterinarians that provide treatment at the shelter on Wednesday's and Friday's each week. If possible, we will utilize our Doctors.

Authorization to foster parents for vet visits can be given for any of the following after checking in with Foster Contact:

Fever (103.5 or above, rectally), respiratory distress (choking, wheezing, open-mouth breathing, shortness of breath); green secretions and/or bad odor from nasal area; not eating or drinking for more than a few days; extreme lethargy for more than a day or two; obvious distress, pain or pronounced behavior changes.

For kittens less than 2-3 weeks, open mouth breathing, not nursing or taking the bottle, and crawling away from the litter/mother are bad, often hopeless signs. Call your Foster Contact immediately.

If kittens are eating and active, there is likely no urgency in seeking a vet visit. Seek only in cases when symptoms are lingering, diarrhea is lingering, or secretions are green. It can also be considered when the lingering symptoms seems to be the only thing delaying a kitten otherwise ready for adoption.

Medical Supplies

To help save money, please do not accept these items from veterinary clinics as they can be obtained at the shelter:

- Advantage (for fleas)
- Droncit (for tapeworm)
- FVRCP vaccination or boosters
- Nutracal
- Otomite or Acaress (for ear mites)
- Strongid-T (routine wormer, mainly for roundworms)

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- Teramycin antibiotic eye ointment²
- Triple antibiotic eye ointment ("BNP")²

These items are also available at the shelter, but you may accept from a vet clinic if you don't know how to give subcutaneous fluids:

- Fluid bags (Lactated Ringers or Normosol)
- Tubing and needles for fluid administration

Please ask if your cat needs subcutaneous fluids for dehydration and lethargy. There are several people in the foster parent group willing to make home visits to administer fluids. This will often get help to a sick cat faster and also save money.

Betadine/normal saline in a 1:20 solution can be used as an eye drop and nose drop in cats/kittens with URI and/or eye inflammation. This home remedy may reduce the severity of URI symptoms and the need for veterinary care, as well as other medications.

All oral or injected antibiotics require a prescription, as well as other eye ointments or drops other than the two mentioned above.

Allergies

Cats, like people, can have allergic reactions to medication. Most medications are not given first at the vet office. If some sudden, adverse reaction happens after giving a new medication, such as wheezing or eyes being more inflamed, do not give any more medication and call the veterinarian.

Spay/Neuter

Spay and neuter surgeries are generally done at our shelter by the U of I or at a local veterinary clinic prior to the time of adoption, but any time a cat has to undergo anesthesia for a procedure, he should be altered at the same time.

Female kittens with umbilical hernias will have this repaired at the time of their spay surgery. Male kittens should have their umbilical hernias repaired at a vet clinic, as it involves an abdominal incision.

Vaccination & Worming

"FVR" stands for feline viral rhinotracheitis, a disease that causes sneezing and discharge from eyes and nose (the URI symptoms often seen).

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"C" stands for calici virus, which causes oral ulcers and symptoms similar to, but less profuse, than FVR. Calici virus sometimes progresses to a type of pneumonia.

"P" stands for panleukopenia (aka "feline distemper"); this usually deadly disease attacks rapidly dividing cells and causes loss of appetite, bloody diarrhea and/or vomiting, extreme lethargy and collapse.

Kittens should be started on vaccines at six weeks of age. By this age the maternal antibodies (from the mother's first milk) are beginning to fade. Boosters need to be given every three weeks until 16 weeks of age. The vaccine will not trigger the desired response until the maternal antibodies have worn off – and it is impossible to tell when exactly that happens.

Vaccinations should be given even if kittens have URI symptoms.

Strongid is the wormer given to cats and kittens. The dose is 0.1cc per lb. (An adult of 10 lbs. would receive 1 cc, a kitten weighing 1 lb. would get 0.1 cc). Worming should start at 1 lb., usually around five weeks of age. Strongid treats roundworms or Ascarids, also hookworms and whipworms, which are very common in kittens. Different worms/parasites require different medications.

A second dose of wormer must be given 10 days to two weeks after the first dose.

Since Strongid does not kill worms in the larval stage, the lifecycle will start over again if the second dose is not timed correctly or missed. If you miss the two-week mark, you must start over with a first dose.

Get complete instructions from your Foster Contact or attending veterinarian.

Socialization

The ideal time for socializing kittens is from two to seven weeks of age. As soon as their eyes and ears are opening, socialization opportunities begin. Socialization after this age range is still possible, but becomes more difficult. Attempting socialization after 12 to 14 weeks of age will have more limited success.

Cats and kittens are individuals and each will respond differently to socializing techniques. Some cats can be genetically friendly but feral by experience.

Try to avoid raising solo kittens. Not only do we want them to socialize them to humans, but also they learn how to be a cat, gain a social identity and are likely to tolerate feline companions later if raised with a sibling

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or littermates. Even if kept as an only cat in adulthood, a solo-raised kitten is more likely to display undesirable behaviors to his human companions.

Eye contact should be quickly broken. Staring at a kitten is threatening. When fearful or stimulated, a cat's eye will dilate. Be aware of the eyes, since you may see them dilate as a first (fear) reaction, but as the kittens get familiar with you, the pupils will quickly return to a normal size.

Keep the kitten in a room with no inaccessible hiding spots. Making frequent visits to the room and just sitting gets kitty used to your presence.

Next, using a stick or dowel with feathers attached to one end, provide visual stimulation and distraction. A second stick or dowel with a soft fabric on it can be used to touch. As kitty gets comfortable with your presence, try moving closer each time.

Do this when kitty eats, perhaps just laying your hand nearby, progressing to being able to hand feed and later to touching kitty. At this point, when you are able to touch, use a finger to make small 1¼-inch clockwise circles all around kitty's shoulders, head and upper back. Make the circles small and quick and leave the body after each time.

→ **Food is your best socialization tool, so become familiar with these simple techniques:**
[ASPCApro.org/resource/saving-lives-behavior-enrichment/using-food-successful-kitten-socialization](https://www.aspcapro.org/resource/saving-lives-behavior-enrichment/using-food-successful-kitten-socialization)

Showcasing Your Foster

Web Presence

If her picture is already on our Web site, you should write a new story about the cat's personality. A good story makes a big difference in the number of calls the cat gets, so be descriptive! Try to include things like:

- Whether the cat likes to be petted or held
- Is a lap cat
- Purrs easily
- Is vocal or quiet
- Is active and playful or calm
- Has good litter box manners
- Uses a scratching post

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- Has experience with other animals and children, etc.

Of course, any cute things that she does or anything you want to point out about her fur or appearance is good as well. It can be as long as you want, but the typical description is a paragraph or two.

If the cat has some bad habits, this can be discussed during the first phone conversation. The web story should generate interest, not turn people away. We don't want to mislead people; however we really try to focus on the positive. Please e-mail the story to the Foster Contact.

Check the Web site a day or two after you have sent your info. You know the cat best and will catch any errors on the site. If you don't see the cat listed or if there are mistakes, just send an e-mail with any corrections.

Photos

If your cat's picture is not yet on the Web site, then there are several options for getting pictures taken and posted. If you have access to a digital camera or phone with a camera and would like to take the pictures yourself, you are welcome to do so. Please e-mail to the Foster Contact with your bio.

→ **For photos and descriptions that entice adopters, check out these techniques from ASPCApro: resource/saving-lives-adoption-marketing/hot-shots-getting-great-photos-your-animals resource/saving-lives-adoption-marketing-foster-care/tips-presenting-your-adoptable-animals-well aspcapro.org/blog/2014/06/12/tip-week-all-your-selfie**

Getting to Adoption

Once pictures and stories are posted, calls are funneled through the adoption team where a pre-screening of potential adopters is done. You will be provided the names and numbers of potential adopters. Call and discuss the cat and further screen them as you like. If they sound like suitable adopters, you will arrange a meeting with them and we can help with scheduling meet and greets as well. The process for adoption should then be followed if things work out.

Showing in the Shelter

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Foster cats may be shown in the adoption viewing room by appointment only. To find out more about adoption room policies or to schedule a time slot, contact the adoption team.

Shelter staff and other volunteers ask that we observe the following guidelines:

It is a shelter rule that all potential adopters must fill out an application and talk to an adoption team member before they handle any cat, including foster cats.

Please avoid bringing extra family members during your meet and greets as our small adoption room gets crowded very easily. Also, please don't bring children and leave them to roam about the shelter.

Screening Potential Adopters

Friends, co-workers and relatives may want to adopt your foster cat. If they are qualified adopters, we are more than happy for that to happen. Please follow the shelter guidelines. The shelter adoption team always does a final screening and have the final authority to approve all adoptions. You are also welcome to adopt your foster cat, following the same procedures as everyone else.

Foster parents are encouraged to screen potential adopters regardless of prior pre-screening by the shelter adoption team. Ask open-ended questions about plans for adding a new feline to the household.

Please remind them that cats can live over 20 years, and that this is a lifetime commitment! What will they do if they move? Travel? If the cat gets sick?

Statistics show that the lifespan of an indoor cat is doubled. If adopters plan on letting their cat outdoors please remind them of the many dangers of being outside, including cars, wildlife, poisonous substances, troubled people, etc. Also, no adopter should plan on letting a small kitten outdoors for quite some time, unless it's on a leash and harness. These are just a few suggestions.

The Adoption Process

Please let your Foster Contact know when your animal has been adopted. This way her picture can be removed from our website and we will know she's no longer available in case there were any other calls about her.

Kittens must weigh two pounds to be adopted, with no exceptions. They must weigh that much to be spayed/neutered, which must be done prior to going to their new home. There are no exceptions to this either.

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If you have people wanting to adopt your foster and you approve of them, please give them a note indicating:

- Your approval
- Your full name
- The cat's animal number and name
- A phone number where you can be reached

Adopters can then go to the shelter to complete their paperwork, have a final screening by a shelter adoption team member and pay the fees. They must have the correct animal number in order to complete the adoption. If you are unsure of the correct animal numbers for kittens, bring them in for identification first.

The fee is approximately \$75 to \$90, depending upon the age of the animal, and what licensing requirements/fees are in their area. This amount covers the adoption fee, leukemia test, first vaccination, worming, licensing, microchip, spay/neuter and a free office visit at partner veterinary clinics.