

Guide for Cat Foster Homes

Top Tips for Foster Parents

- ♥ Always notify the shelter staff at shelter@whitmanpets.org whenever you pick up a new foster cat or return one to the shelter.
- ♥ Check in regularly with your shelter staff.
- ♥ Ask for advice if your cat/kitten has stopped eating.
- ♥ Kittens crash fast, so alert your shelter staff 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 eight weeks 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 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 an entire day (for kittens) or more than two days (for adult cats), let shelter staff 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.

Ask shelter staff about using the home remedy of betadine/normal saline solution as eye/nose drops to help decrease the severity of a URI. We often have pre-mixed solution available for foster parents to pick up.

Dehydration

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 staff member 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 shelter staff 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 to take your foster cat to the shelter or to the vet.

Other Common Issues

Let shelter staff 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.
- Lethargy for more than 1 day.
- 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.

♥ **Review this resource on infection control in foster homes:**
[ASPCApro.org/infection-control-foster-homes](https://www.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 shelter staff first.

All authorized vet visits are paid by the Whitman County Humane Society. They bill the shelter directly so there are no out-of-pocket vet costs to a foster parent.

However, 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.

Authorization to foster parents for vet visits can be given for any of the following:

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 an entire day (for kittens) or more than two days (for adult cats); 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 shelter staff 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:

- Flea treatment
- Tapeworm treatment
- FVRCP vaccination or boosters
- Nutracal
- Ear mite treatment
- Routine dewormer
- Antibiotic eye ointment
- Oral antibiotics

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 may be 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.

Sterile 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.

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 clinic at 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).

"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 to four weeks until about 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 some URI symptoms.

Pyrantel Pamoate is the wormer given to cats and kittens. The dose is 0.2cc per lb. An adult of 10 lbs. would receive 2 cc, a kitten weighing 1 lb. would get 0.2 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 shelter staff 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 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

Even if her picture isn't on our Web site yet, 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
- 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 our first phone conversation with the adopter. 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 shelter staff at shelter@whitmanpets.org.

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 and would like to take the pictures yourself, you are welcome to do so. Please e-mail them in .jpg format to shelter@whitmanpets.org with your story.

If you're not pleased with your own photographs, you are welcome to take your cat to the shelter during one of the scheduled digital photography sessions; just make a request by emailing shelter@whitmanpets.org.

Another option is to have a traveling photographer come to your home to photograph your foster cat. This is a nice option for shy cats and those who don't travel well, or for foster parents with schedule and transportation difficulties. Please contact shelter staff to arrange this option.

♥ **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](http://aspapro.org/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](http://aspapro.org/resource/saving-lives-adoption-marketing-foster-care/tips-presenting-your-adoptable-animals-well) aspapro.org/blog/2014/06/12/tip-week-all-your-selfie**

The Adoption Process

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.

Adopters can then go to the shelter to complete their paperwork, have a final screening by a shelter staff member and pay the fees.

Adopters should arrive at least one hour before closing time to allow enough time for the process and not keep staff after closing time. Please ask adopters to avoid starting the adoption right at opening time as well since it's a very busy time for the staff.

The fee is approximately \$70 to \$200 + tax, depending upon the age and condition of the animal. This amount covers the adoption fee, FIV & leukemia test, age-appropriate vaccinations, worming, microchip, spay/neuter and a free office visit with a local veterinarian.