



PET INFORMATION HANDOUT - Cyndee Myers

I provide an information sheet in my kitten/cat care packages for my pet buyers I thought may be interesting to share. When I place my kittens I try to go over everything with the new owners. I have found that it is to much information to fast and people are so excited about their new cat/kitten that very little of the verbal information is retained. I am a big believer that a smooth transition to a new home as well as a stress free environment is a key factor in the kittens immune system development and overall health. I believe most people I choose to place my babies with truly want to provide the best life they can for their kitten. As the breeder, I feel it is my obligation to educate them about kitten/cat care. In addition, I try to collect facts and present them in a way that help the new family understand what kinds of things may create stress, cause behavior problems and such in their cats. There are so many myths about cats that people believe. I am sure you have heard them all just like I have. I truly believe it is up to each of us to educate people about cat care. I include in my kitten package a list of poisonous plants, toxic household products, feline vaccine guidelines and this care guide.

I would enjoy knowing what other breeders provide as their kitten care information. There may be things I would add or delete. Some of this document was given to me by Maureen Escalette when I started with my girl Magic. I am adding information as my pet homes contact me with issues they need advise about.

GENERAL CARE

This information is provided to you by your breeder to give you general care instructions for your new Birman. This does NOT mean that you are not to call me when you have a problem, however minor it may appear to be. The number one rule is, when in doubt, CALL. I have invested a great deal of time, money, and above all, caring about your kitten before it leaves my home, and will continue to be interested in it for the rest of it's life. Remember the Birman legend states " Woe be unto him who does harm to a Birman, whether intentional or not."

Your kitten has been vaccinated for Rhino, Calici and Panleukopenia using either intranasal and/or FVRCP. The intranasal is given when they open their eyes and again 3 weeks later. They receive the first inoculation at around 9 weeks and the second at 13 weeks of age. They will need a booster shot at least one year from the last shot, and every three years thereafter. You will need to give a rabies vaccine at 6 months of age, and booster every one to three years depending on the vaccine your veterinary uses. Do not give your kitten the feline Leukemia Vaccine, Ringworm vaccine or the FIP vaccine. Do not let your cat go outside, and do not bring in another cat without testing for FELV/FIV. Your kitten is guaranteed negative for both.

Your cat will need to have a physical and dental examination at least once a year. If the vet recommends cleaning the teeth, do not have it done at the same time he receives any shots. He will have to be anesthetized for the cleaning and his system doesn't need the additional stress of both shots and anesthesia.

Use medications only under your vet's advise. You should never give a cat aspirin. If your kitten becomes ill you should notify me immediately. Your kitten will be teething between 4 and 6 months of age. This may cause him to be off his feed, have diarrhea, or run a temperature. A cat's normal temperature is 101 to 102

When you take your kitten to your vet for its checkup; you should make him aware that Birmans are extremely sensitive to anesthesia. When the cat needs to be anesthetized for spaying, neutering, dental work or other surgery it should be done with only gas anesthesia. There should be no injectable or pre-injectable anesthesia of any kind used on a Birman.

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Your baby should receive an inch (off your finger) of Nutri-Cal about three times a week and, most importantly, should receive about an inch of Laxatone (or Felomalt) twice a week to avoid hairballs.

Some cats will make you crazy when you try to give them Laxatone or Nutri-Cal. Don't stick it right in their face, as they will usually walk off. Hold it a little away from their nose and give them a chance to smell it a while. I know that your arm is getting tired and the Laxatone is dripping all over the carpet, but once they decide to taste it they usually like it and want to pig out. If he still walks off try again later. Forcing it on them will make them always hate it and you will hate giving it to them. In lieu of Laxatone, some cats love two tablespoons of Mazola Corn Oil in a little bowl, once a week. Also with adults, it is a good idea to mix ½ teaspoon of regular Metamucil in their food, particularly when they are dropping coat, or if you notice their stools are dark and hard.

Clip the tips of their nails weekly. Provide a good scratching post and teach them to use it. He has been trained to use a scratching post, and should not be allowed to forget his training in his new home.

Scoop out his solid waste and wet litter daily. Wash and disinfect the litter pan frequently. Wash it with hot soapy water and rinse in Clorox diluted 32:1 with water.

Wash food dishes after every meal and wash the water bowl daily. Use good solid non-plastic dishes. Plastic dishes can easily become filled with bacteria and are also known to cause chin acne in cats.

CAT PROOF YOUR HOUSE

Kittens can and will get into everything in your house. So an ounce of prevention!

Cover electrical wires and phone cords with the tubing bought at an auto supply to cover car wiring with. It is easy to install, inexpensive and is not too big or unattractive.

Check baseboards in your kitchen around the dishwasher, stove and refrigerator for areas the kitten could crawl into. Also check around the fireplace and make sure the kitten will not gain access.

Strings, rubber band, paper clips, plastic bags, etc. can be very dangerous, so try not to leave them lying around.

Many everyday cleaning products are toxic to your new kitten. The most harmful of all are cleaners containing Phenols (pine oils) two of the most common are Pine Sol and Lysol. If you must use these products in your home it is important that they be rinsed off after they are used and allowed to completely dry prior to the kitten having access to the room again. Remember cats/kittens lick their feet, so if they get these products on their feet they will be ingesting them.

I am enclosing a list of Poisonous Plants. Please check your home and make sure your new kitten does not have access to these.

DIET

Even though your new Birman may seem large, please remember, it is still just a kitten, and will need lots of good nourishing food. Remember, too, that a kitten will not let you know when it is hungry (unlike a grown cat), so it is important to try to keep it on a schedule and see that it gets the proper food necessary for its growth and development.

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I feed my kittens a mixture of Nutro Kitten food and Eukanuba Chicken and Rice. It is available at all times along with fresh water. I feed canned food, Friskies Sliced Chicken in Gravy and/or Whiska's Chicken in Sauce at about 6 AM and 4 PM. This will have to be adjusted to your schedule but they need to be fed the same way. If you decide you wish to switch foods I will strongly suggest you use only premium foods and any change should be done gradually. If you do it all at once you will upset the kittens digestive system and that can be serious. Remember cats are obligate carnivores (meat eaters) so check labels and make sure the foods you choose have meat as the first ingredients. Many foods are heavy on grains and fillers. Diets heavy on these can cause your cat to become overweight and could cause health issues later in life such as diabetes.

If by chance your cat/kitten goes off its food at anytime during its life it is important for you to know that a cat cannot be allowed to go more than two (2) days without eating. At three days or over they can have long term physical damage. So it is important to seek veterinary advice and you may need to force feed your cat/kitten should this situation occur.

GROOMING YOUR NEW BIRMAN

You should get your baby used to being groomed with short "fun" sessions while they are still young so that they will come to enjoy it as an adult.

The best comb is a metal "Greyhound" style comb. The teeth are rounded and it flows through the coat easily, without pulling, while getting down to the skin. You should only have to comb your Birman once a week. During shedding season you may want to do it a little more often. This would be in the Spring and in the Fall.

DECLAWING

The Cat Fancy, and especially myself, believe that declawing is a cruel mutilation of the cat. The claws are not removed the toes are amputated! It is also totally unnecessary. Your kitten has been trained to use a scratching post, and all it will take is for you to continue this training. Provide a scratching post in the areas the cat lives in. To help attract them to it try rubbing catnip into the post. If you should catch the cat/kitten trying to use the sofa or chair, use a spray bottle filled with water. Squirt the cat and say "NO". There is a no declaw clause in your contract and I expect that to be honored. If you are concerned that other cats in your house have been declawed and it might cause a problem with a new kitten, I can assure you that I have placed several cats in the same situation and there have been no problems.

BRINGING HOME A NEW CAT OR KITTEN

Bringing home a new cat or kitten is always exciting. You cannot wait to introduce the new addition to your family and friends; and you are already looking forward to years of happy companionship. The way you introduce your new cat to your household can make a big difference in how well he makes the adjustment. Remember that cats are very much creatures of habit. They like things to be predictable and pretty much the same from day to day. You will be taking your cat out of a familiar environment, putting him into a noisy, moving vehicle, then expecting him to adjust to new surroundings, new people and perhaps, new animals. This is a lot to ask, and no matter how wonderful you and your home are, even the most easy-going cat is likely to be stressed and nervous! To make the transition as smooth as possible, take things slowly, and give your cat plenty of time to get used to his new home. Before you bring your new cat or kitten home Making some plans ahead of time will make the transition to a new home much easier for you and your cat.

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THE INITIAL INTRODUCTION TO YOUR HOME

First, make an appointment with your veterinarian to have your new pet examined. If possible, schedule the appointment so you can take your cat to the veterinarian immediately after picking him up.

Make sure you have a sturdy travel crate for the cat to ride in. Most of the time the trip home will involve a car ride. When cats are nervous, they may feel more secure in an enclosed space. An unrestrained cat can be a real driving hazard, especially if they climb down by the pedals, or jumps onto your shoulder. Having your cat in a carrier can also be helpful in case the cat vomits, urinates or defecates, which some cats will do if they are nervous.

The sense of smell is very important to cats, and it will make them more comfortable to have something that smells like their former home. For kittens, it is especially helpful to take a towel or blanket the kitten has been sleeping on with you to his new home. Make arrangements ahead of time with the breeder or shelter, possibly bringing them a towel for the cat to sleep on for several days before you pick her up. Place the towel in the carrier for the ride home, and leave it in the carrier for your new pet to sleep on the first few days.

Cats need to become thoroughly familiar with new surroundings before they feel comfortable. An entire apartment or house can be overwhelming all at once. Many cats will hide under beds or furniture, sometimes for days. It will be much less stressful for your cat to learn about you, your family and your home a little at a time. This is even more important if there are multiple people and/or pets in your household.

To limit the number of changes your new pet will need to experience the first day, before you get the cat, find out what food and litter the cat has had, and get the same brand. The trick to keeping your cat happy in his environment is to either keep things the same, or else change them gradually enough so that the cat doesn't notice. For instance, if you need to change the type of food he is eating, do so over a two or three week period, slowly reducing the amount of the old food, while replacing it with the new. Changing litter may just be the biggest cause of cat behavior problems. If at all possible, stay with old reliable. If you must switch, do so using the same gradual method you'd use with a food switch

Cats love routine; they get very comfortable with having you come home at the same time each day, and with seeing the same goings-on through the living room window. Your cat will grow accustomed to the furniture, the carpet, the smell of your bedspread, and even the brand of air freshener you use. When you abruptly change things, he might react adversely to it, often develop cat behavior problems. Yes ! There are that sensitive !!

THE INTRODUCTION TO OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS

Introduce other family members slowly. Have them come into the room one at a time to pet and play with the cat. Have younger children sit down, then show them how to gently stroke the cat's fur and offer her a few treats.

Make certain that children understand that they are not to chase the cat, hurt it or bother it while it eats, sleeps or uses the litter box. If there are no other pets, you can let the cat begin to explore the rest of the house in a few days.

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Homes with other pets should keep the pets separate from the new cat/kitten until it is familiar with it's new home and family. Normally this should take a week or two depending on the individual cat. The initial introduction should be supervised. The safest and least stressful way to introduce the new arrival is to put them in the carrier in the room they have been living in and close the carrier door. The carrier has been in the room since their arrival, and they are familiar and feel safe there. Open the door to the room and allow the family pets to enter the room. This will allow the two to meet in a manner, that should a fight break out, no one can be harmed, and you can easily remove the family pets. Normally after a week or two the family pets are past the stage of being upset and they are curious to meet the new arrival. The new cat/kitten has also become familiar enough they are also anxious to meet. You will know from the reaction of both the family pets and your new cat/kitten if the time is right. If there is a lot of upset, remove the family pets, shut the room off again and allow a few more days to pass before trying another introduction.

UNDERSTANDING STRESS FACTORS

Stress in our lives is as common as breathing. We have too much to do and too little time. Working mothers face the demands of home, job and children. Maybe someone in your family has a chronic illness so you take on the caretaker role along with other duties. Perhaps you have a new baby or you're going through a divorce or someone close to you dies. All of these common stressors pile up in our lives until they quite literally can make us sick. Immunodeficiency diseases, cardiovascular disease, asthma and diabetes have all been linked to stress.

Do you ever think of your cat's life in terms of stress, though? You watch your cat sleeping, eating, grooming, and sleeping again. It looks like a pretty enviable lifestyle. But cats can and do become stressed just as we do over things in their environment. These stressors can lead to feline behavior problems like aggression, inappropriate use of the litter box, or illnesses such as urinary tract infection.

The American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP), a professional organization of veterinarians dedicated to providing the best medical and surgical care for cats, is thinking about the stress in your cat's life. They decided that it's time to issue feline behavior guidelines directed toward your cat's behavioral health and well-being. This is the first time there have been any guidelines addressing your cat's mental health.

According to Karen Overall, head of the Behavior Clinic at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine and co-chair of the AAFP guidelines committee, many veterinarians simply haven't recognized that elimination disorders and urinary tract infections are often connected to anxiety brought on by stressors in the cat's social environment. Cats are under-studied compared to dogs, which leads to a lack of knowledge about what makes cats tick.

"Cats definitely are not small dogs. They have their own problems. They are unique," said Dr. Emily Walker, D.V.M., owner of the Albuquerque Cat Clinic, a feline-only veterinary practice. "I think it is inappropriate to try to diagnose a cat in an environment where they are stressed by other patients, namely dogs. Stress in the veterinary environment affects test readings and sometimes creates difficulty in making an accurate diagnosis."

Stress is a term used by veterinarians to describe changes-mental and physical-that occur when a cat perceives a potential threat. The cat's body prepares to either fight or flee the threat. If a cat remains stressed over a period of time, he will be in a chronic state of anxiety that can lead to behavioral changes and illness.

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Recognizing and eliminating the stressors in your cat's environment will help you relieve your cat's anxiety before it reaches crisis level. Stressor detection can be difficult, though, because you might not even notice something that is a huge irritant to your cat. Some feline red flags are:

- Illness. Disease can cause behavior change so you need to have your veterinarian give your cat a clean bill of health before you start looking for other causes of stress.
- Outside stress that triggers a negative response. This might be a strange cat who sits on the windowsill outside or a dog in your yard. To your cat, this stranger is invading his territory, and there's nothing he can do about it.
- A change in the cat's home environment. Have you moved the furniture lately, bought a new house, or changed the type of kitty litter you use?
- Change in a cat's daily routine. Have you changed his feeding time? Do you go to bed at a different time?
- Strange scents. These can be animal or human.
- Loud noises. Your cat's hearing is at least five times sharper than yours so imagine what construction noise must sound like to him.
- Overcrowding. Every cat needs personal space just as you do. This is particularly true in multicat households.
- A bully cat. If you have several cats, one may bully another leading to a fear response and anxiety in the cat being bullied.
- Dirty litter box. This is often the cause of inappropriate elimination.
- Boredom in an environment that never changes.

Your veterinarian isn't just being snoopy if he asks about your personal life. He's trying to help your cat.

"I ask new patients to fill out a form that contains a section on any changes in their cat's behavior. Have they noticed any change in the cat's urination or defecation? Does the cat go outside? How many cats are in the household? If they indicate that there have been behavior changes, we look into that a lot more closely," said Dr. Walker. "I also want to know what's going on in their lives. Have they moved to a new house? Have they been married or divorced recently? Have they had a baby? Any of those things could affect their cat."

There are some simple, but effective, things you can do to help relieve your cat's stress. Remove the stressor, if possible. Have daily sessions of grooming, massage, and interactive play with your cat. Be consistent in your routines. Leave a window partially open so your cat can smell things outside. Ideally the window or screened-in porch should have a place where the cat can watch all that's happening outdoors and still be safe. Cats are intelligent, unique animals who need to have that intelligence stimulated.

You will benefit from the deepening bond created through increased interaction with your cat and, just as importantly, your cat will be contented and stress free.

MOVING WITH YOUR PET

Moving from one city to another, or to another home in the same city, happens to most people in today's world. Due to career changes, family circumstances, or the need for more or less room in a dwelling, most of us will move at least once during our lifetime. To a human, a new home can be exciting and pleasurable, but to cats, a move can be equally devastating. Or, depending on the circumstances of the move, the event can be a traumatic experience for all involved, both human and feline.

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As a creature of habit and usually resenting the slightest changes, uprooting a cat from the security of the familiar turf he has called home is confusing, traumatizing, and frightening. The cat is already confused and stressed at the hustle and bustle: seeing familiar furnishings being moved around, strange boxes piled high, and accompanying all this, such noise and activity as he has never experienced before. Some cats will totally freak out over the smallest upset within their environment.

People who move leaving their cat behind have committed one of the cruelest deeds which can be done to a pet. The lost sense of security and well-being during a move is extremely upsetting to the average cat, but to also lose the family the cat has called his own must surely crush his spirit and rip holes deep into his soul.

Moving is one of the most stressful events for people and their pets. There are certain precautions you can take to make everything go more smoothly.

If you are selling your house it is important to make sure that your animals do not escape when a realtor shows your house. Some people try putting up signs to warn of animals in the house and to not let them out, but there are still too many stories of animals escaping. It is best to not let your house be shown without you present. If this is not possible, then you may require prior notice of a showing and then confine the animals to an area. Ask the realtor to show that area last and then leave that door open when they are done. This will reduce the risk of losing your pets. One client had her cat get into the attic during a showing only to discover when she got home that her cat was inside the downstairs walls.

When packing for a move it is best not to have your pets around. Moves are especially stressful for cats. It can get very noisy and is extremely disruptive. Cats tend to find remote hiding spots or escape through an open door - this serves only to heighten your own stress! One client related the story of their cat hiding in a dresser drawer. They did not discover the cat was missing until all the furniture had been loaded and the truck was gone. The furniture was in storage for three weeks and only when unloaded did they discover the cat! It was alive but starving and dehydrated. Some people try to confine their pets to a room but sometime the movers do not pay attention to signs on doors and will inadvertently let them out.

There are certain things you should do to your new home prior to moving your animals in. If the carpet is not new you should have it cleaned to remove any old pet odors. Regardless if the house is new, you should have the house treated for fleas - construction workers will bring their dogs on the site, possibly infesting the house with fleas. If there is any construction to be done to the house, it is best to have it done prior to moving in.

Transporting your pets is usually always stressful to them and you. If you are moving a long distance it is best to drive them. Flying can be dangerous for animals unless they are in the cabin. If you choose to fly them in the cabin, call in advance. Some airlines have restrictions on the number of animals and the type of carriers. Most usually require health certificates. Some owners automatically think their pets should be tranquilized for travel. This depends on the type of transportation, the personality of your pet and its health. Tranquilizers can have side effects so check with your veterinarian. If you drive with your pets - keep them in a carrier! There would be nothing more horrible than your pet escaping out the door when you get in and out or having an accident due to an animal interfering with your driving.

Providing familiarity helps cut down the disorientation. With this in mind when bringing them into their new home, introduce them to a smaller area first, creating a temporary room. This allows you to "cat proof" your new home before turning them loose. The day the cat is to be placed in his temporary room, bring your cat's bed if he uses one to sleep in at night.

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However, if he sleeps with you in or on your bed, take the stripped off sheets and other linens from the bed for him to rest and sleep on. He will feel more like himself with his and your scents on familiar feeling linens. By making his surroundings feel secure and familiar, calm and comforting, the cat will settle down with very few stressful moments. You will be less stressed as well. You should bring the cat to his temporary room before the moving day's activities begin, but on the same day. If your cat must take medications, make sure those are with you at all times. Don't leave your cat alone in a strange environment when his anxiety is at its peak. You should have his room fully prepared for his temporary stay.

Make a special trip with only the cat, securely contained in his carrier, to the new home at least an hour before the moving van arrives. During this extra time, you should talk with your cat, letting him hear your voice and feel your petting to ease his anxiety. If you must leave, have someone he knows and trusts stay with him until you return. In the case of multiple cats, if at all possible, bring them all in one trip so that no one cat is left alone at any given time. As a reminder, remember to make sure that his room is off-limits to everyone, with windows and doors securely closed at all times. In fact, it may be wise to tape a large notice with bold letters stating "Keep Out of This Room" on any doors of his room.

If you must store packed boxes in the cat's room, it helps to mask the strangeness of them by placing on and over the boxes towels, blankets, quilts, spreads, and the like - actually anything from his old home with the scent of you and him on the items. Those can be packed at the last minute once the cat has left for the new residence or quickly put away if used in the new home.

Make sure he has the same water/food dishes and eats the same diet from the old home. It's extremely important that he continues to receive his normal daily intake of water. If he is used to drinking tap water, begin storing several gallons of water from the old residence. Start giving him the stored water about a week before the move. The reason you should begin giving him the stored water before the move is because of the possible "taste" from the storage containers. Why store the water in the first place? The new water, though perhaps coming from the same source in the same town, will be different than he is used to smelling and tasting from his old home. Even the same water source coming from your next door neighbor's faucets will smell and taste different to your cat since it comes through different pipes into that residence. A couple of days after the move, begin to gradually add to his dish the water from the new home into the water from the old. Before he can determine the difference in taste, he will be drinking tap water from the new residence. Oftentimes, traveling cats won't eat or drink very much. This is a normal reaction caused by their anxiety, though water intake and output should be closely monitored. Make sure your cat drinks some water each day. His appetite and drinking should return to normal within 24 - 36 hours after the move. If not, take your cat immediately to the vet to make sure that he hasn't become constipated or developed a urinary blockage due to stress. Both conditions, if left untreated, can be life-threatening to cats.

The main thought to keep in mind regarding a move is to remember a cat's emotions and reasoning abilities are equivalent to a two year old human child's. Remembering this one fact will make any moving experience a much smoother transition for both you and your cat. With understanding, patience, and an outpouring of love shown to your cat during this eruptive period in his life, you will both experience great rewards - More than likely, your cat will do beautifully with his beloved people's scents and his familiar belongings around him, with the same water to drink and food to eat as he's always had. He will gracefully make the move into a new home with no problem as you begin to place your furniture and other belongings in their new places. He will have new places to explore and new adventures awaiting that will happily occupy his energy and time. His senses will be highly attuned - anything new to savor by sight, scent, taste, sound, and touch will eventually become as familiar to him as his favorite toy. If you follow the above procedures, your cat will breeze through the transition with the minimal of problems ... for after all, your cat knows home is where love, trust, security, food, good care, and you are.