

Cat Health and Personality Concerns

Find out how to select a new companion for a cat and what health concerns should signal warnings.

Q: We are getting a new male Ocicat kitten as a companion to our 8-year-old female Ocicat. The one we selected, at 5 weeks old, had a slight curving of one of its front legs that the breeder says was from its position in the womb. When we visited the kitten at 9 weeks old, its leg appeared straightened, and the kitten was active and appeared healthy. This kitten was in a group of nine kittens, and he was a bit shy and quiet — not an alpha kitten. Should we be concerned? Our older cat had a similar personality when we selected her and has strong personality now. What personality traits in a kitten are compatible with an older dominating cat?

This breeder also has a kitten with a disability of the two front forearms. The breeder thought the kitten was in the fallopian tubes during pregnancy. At 5 weeks old, this kitten could not walk normally on its front legs like its siblings. It scooted and pushed itself around on its front legs. At 9 weeks old, its legs are straightening out but are still somewhat curved. The kitten appears to do more walking than scooting. It eats normally, appears close in size to its siblings, but tends to quietly watch the others. Would this kitten be a good companion for a senior citizen? Could there be any other health issues? The kitten would see a vet within 72 hours of leaving the breeder. I thought that it might be a good match for my elderly parents whose last cat died in the fall.

A: I think it is more than a coincidence that this breeder has had two kittens with skeletal deformities. I doubt that the deformities are because of abnormal positioning in the womb or an ectopic pregnancy. It sounds more like poor breeding, possibly inbreeding. Fortunately, it sounds as though the leg deformities begun to resolve, clinically, as the kittens get older, although it is impossible to say what is happening orthopedically without examining the cat.

Adult cats' personalities are difficult to predict based on their behaviors as kittens. Often, the mellowest kitten in the litter turns out to be extroverted, while the craziest kitten in the litter (like my cat, Crispy) becomes a laid-back, low-key cat upon maturity. In general, it is easy to introduce a kitten into a household with one cat because the kitten usually poses no threat to the resident cat's status. In most cases, if a kitten tries to exert dominance, the resident cat usually puts the kitten in its place with a swat or two.

Regarding whether the kitten with the orthopedic problems would be a good match for your parents, as long as a veterinarian confirms that the orthopedic problems are minor and will resolve, there should be no problem. However, if there is any question about the health of this kitten, you might want to think twice about saddling your elderly parents with a kitten that might require many veterinary visits, special care and possible extra expense.

Regards,
Arnold Plotnick, DVM