

Baby's First Checkup

Here's what you need to know for a stress-free and productive veterinary visit.

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Skin and coat: Checked for excessive dander, dull hair coat, ringworm and external parasites such as fleas or mites. **Neurologic and musculoskeletal systems:** Any deformity of the limbs, spine, skull or chest wall should be noted. The veterinarian may watch the kitten explore the exam room to evaluate its mental alertness and coordination.

Body condition: This is especially important if you have a longhaired kitten because hiding under that fluff could be either a too-boney or too-chubby kitten.

Vaccinations Gone are the days of cookie-cutter vaccination protocols. A conscientious veterinarian will tailor a vaccination program based on diseases for which your kitten may realistically be at risk of contracting. If the kitten will venture outdoors, it will need a broader spectrum of disease protection than one living strictly inside. Some newer vaccines, such as those for ringworm, giardia, feline infectious peritonitis (FIP) and feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) are controversial and not appropriate for every cat. Discuss the vaccination options with your veterinarian so that you fully understand the benefits and risks of each type of vaccination.

Parasites If fleas, ticks or heartworms are a problem in your area, ask your vet how to safely prevent your kitten's exposure. One or more dewormings may be done routinely in kittenhood, or based on fecal testing.

Nutritional Counseling Your veterinarian should assess the nutritional value of your kitten's food and answer any questions you may have about proper nutrition. We know from current research that good nutrition is critical for the development of your kitten's immune system, setting the stage for disease-fighting ability for the rest of its life, so don't skimp on quality here.

Q & A Time Take the opportunity to ask any questions you have. For general questions, you may be provided with educational pamphlets on the subject. Take them home and read them. If you're still wondering what to do, phone your clinic and ask again. An experienced veterinary technician or perhaps the doctor will return your call, usually by the end of the day.