

Caring for your Ragdoll Cat

Diet

- When you collect your new kitten the breeder should provide you with a diet sheet, detailing the foods that your Ragdoll has been weaned on. It is advisable to continue to feed this diet for the first two weeks, at the very least, as changes made too quickly, combined with the stress associated with joining a new family, can result in a kitten with an upset tummy. A kitten with diarrhoea can become dehydrated and deteriorate very quickly, so if your Ragdoll has loose stools for more than 24 hours you should always consult your vet.
- If you decide you want to change your Ragdoll's diet, then do this gradually, by mixing a little of your chosen food with your kitten's usual food. If there is no adverse reaction, then gradually increase the amount of new food that is mixed with your kitten's usual diet, until the switch is complete.
- Kittens have very small stomachs, so need feeding little and often. When your Ragdoll joins your family at at least 13 weeks old, they will need to be fed at least four times daily. This can be reduced to three meals a day once your kitten is about 18 weeks old and by the time they are six months old, most kittens will only need two meals a day. It is important to feed an excellent quality 'kitten' food, until your Ragdoll is a year old, as these are specially formulated to meet the nutritional needs of a growing kitten. Once your Ragdoll reaches a year old, you can change to an 'adult' diet.
- Fresh drinking water should be available at all times.
- Do not feed your kitten cow's milk, as it is likely to cause diarrhoea.
- Feeding a premium quality, well balanced diet will help keep your Ragdoll healthy.

Grooming

There is much said about the non-matting coat of the Ragdoll and therefore the limited need for grooming. However regular grooming, with a suitable brush and comb, for all Ragdolls is essential to maintain a healthy, knot free coat. A Ragdoll who is not brushed regularly will develop knots, which if left will cause discomfort and sore skin. Grooming removes dead, loose fur, which reduces the risk of the formation of fur balls and goes some way to limiting moulting onto furniture and carpets. Grooming is a good way to bond with a new kitten and is important in maintaining a good relationship with an older cat. When grooming your Ragdoll pay particular attention to under the chin, around the back legs, the tummy and the armpits, as this is where knots are most likely to develop.

Ragdoll Health

Vaccination

Your Ragdoll kitten should be fully vaccinated against **cat flu** and **enteritis**, by the time they join your family. The breeder should provide you with a vaccination record, indicating when your kitten's booster is due. It is important to maintain the protection that vaccination affords, by ensuring that you take your Ragdoll to the vet for an annual booster. Taking your Ragdoll for their vaccination gives your vet the opportunity to give the cat a thorough health check and the potential to diagnose any problems early on. The **leukaemia** vaccine is not necessary for Ragdolls who are kept indoors, but please seek the advice of your vet.

Flea Control

Observe your Ragdoll's coat regularly for any signs of flea infestation. Small black specks within the coat are likely to be flea dirt, but if you are unsure, place a piece of damp white kitchen towel beneath your Ragdoll as you groom. Any flea dirt will drop onto the towel and dissolve into dark spots of blood. If fleas are evident, then use a suitable flea treatment from your vet, such as Front Line. Your vet will also be able to supply a spray for use around the home to kill fleas and eggs which may be living in furniture and carpets. Regular preventative use of a flea spray is advisable, as apart from the discomfort these visitors cause to the cat, they are also intermediate hosts within the life cycle of the tape worm. Infestation with fleas can lead to infestation with tape worm.

Worming

Regular worming is another important part in keeping your Ragdoll healthy. Indoor cats, that never have access to the outside, should be wormed twice yearly, with a product from your vet. Avoid using wormers available from pet shops as they are not always as effective as veterinary grade treatments. Cats which go out should be wormed at three month intervals.

Neutering

Your pet Ragdoll should be neutered at approximately 6 months old. Un-neutered adult cats both male and female may spray and once this habit is developed neutering does not necessarily stop it. Neutering also prevents infections, tumours etc. of the reproductive organs and general loss of condition in the cat, caused by reproductive hormones. There is nothing to be gained from leaving your Ragdoll entire and female Ragdolls do not 'benefit' from having one litter, so neutering is the responsible thing to do.

Knowing Your Ragdoll

It is also advisable to give your Ragdoll a thorough check over yourself, weekly and to become familiar with what is normal for your cat. In this way, you are likely to notice any early signs of illness or disease, which can lead to early diagnosis and hence increase the chances of successful treatment by your vet.

- Check that your Ragdoll's eyes are bright and clean, with no discharge. Check the third eye lid is not visible, as this is often a sign of poor health.
- Look inside your Ragdoll's ears and make sure they are clean. Any small deposits of wax can be cleaned away from the outer ear using damp cotton wool, but never penetrate the inner ear. Observe for any signs of ear mite infestation, which manifests as excessive production of thick, dark wax.
- Check your Ragdoll's teeth for any signs of tartar build up, a particular problem in older cats. Foul smelling breath and red swollen gums may indicate gum infection or an abscess.
- Gently feel over your Ragdoll's body for any lumps or swelling, paying particular attention to the neck and high up under the front and back legs (i.e. the arm pits).

If you discover any problems or are concerned for your cat's health, then **consult your vet immediately.**

Safety

Indoor cats are safer cats and Ragdolls should not be allowed to roam freely, as the risks to them are too high.

- Injury or death from road accidents
- Poisoning from garden chemicals e.g. slug pellets, garden plants etc.
- Poisoning from chemicals such as anti-freeze
- Infection with incurable, fatal diseases such as FIV (feline aids) and FELV (feline leukaemia)
- Theft
- Territorial fights with other cats in the neighbourhood, leading abscesses etc.

Ragdolls love to be in the company of their human and are happy to stay indoors, so why put them at risk?

There are hazards indoors too, especially to a young kitten and so taking steps to keep your Ragdoll safe in your home is very important. The following list is by no means exhaustive and intended only as guidance.

- Ragdolls are fascinated by water, so an inexperienced kitten is at risk of drowning so keep the toilet lid down and take care when running a bath.
- Washing machines and tumble dryers may seem cosy, warm places to a kitten. Always check inside before use.
- Open fires must be guarded and be sure to use a guard which has a top, as a kitten will climb and could easily fall. Hot ovens and pans of boiling liquids are also a danger.
- Teething kittens may chew on electrical cables, so ensure they are not accessible.
- Stray needles or pins, plastic carrier bags, elastic bands, plastic, polythene etc. etc. all pose a hazard to a kitten who sees everything as a 'toy'.
- Kittens may become entangled in loose strings or cords, for example the pull cords on blinds, leading to strangulation.
- Pieces of thread, or similar are attractive to kittens, but if swallowed can tangle in the intestine.
- Household chemicals, such as dish washer powder, bleach, disinfectants, anti freeze, human medicines etc. are all poisonous if ingested by a kitten or cat. Store all chemicals away from your Ragdoll. Use cat safe disinfectants, such as **Trigene** or **Vetasept**, to clean floors and trays etc. Phenol based cleaners, i.e. those which turn water cloudy, such as **Dettol** or **Jeyes Fluid** are **toxic**, even when diluted. Ingestion, even from licking the cleaned surface, can lead to serious illness, even death.
- Many indoor plants are toxic and Ragdolls may chew on leaves or flowers if given the opportunity. **Lilies** are extremely toxic to cats and ingestion can be fatal.
- Open windows, upstairs, may attract the attention of a curious Ragdoll. Once out on the ledge, a kitten may not be able to get back in. Then the only way to go is down, a long way for a small kitten. If a kitten falls it can result in horrific injuries. Having a kitten in your home is like having a toddler, perhaps worse, because kittens being so small, curious and agile can find themselves in all sorts of trouble. Take great care.

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United Kingdom Ragdoll Cat Community

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care and make adjustments, so they are safe.