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Introducing a new pet into the family, although a big responsibility, is an exciting and happy time. The Hughes family have recently taken on another pet, Mikki Mokki a black and white kitten. Mikki Mokki joins our three legged dog Meg and the other cats Molly and Dawson. This made me think about all the things that a new owner or even a seasoned pet owner should think about with a new pet.



Mikki Mokki

Provided your new arrival's mother was up to date with her vaccinations, puppies and kittens should be protected in the first few weeks of life by the antibodies in their mother's

milk. However, this immunity reduces over time, leaving them susceptible to infectious disease, sometime around 2-3 months of age. Vaccinating your cat and dog will help protect them from a number of potentially fatal diseases. Two or more vaccinations are usually given as a primary course, giving your pet immunity for the first year of life. However, this immunity provided by the primary vaccination is not indefinite and will gradually diminish. Regular boosters will be required throughout your pet's life to help maintain this immunity.

On your first visit to the surgery with a new puppy or kitten your new addition will be checked over by a nurse who will be able to answer all your questions about fleas and worms, and how to protect your pet against them. Don't be embarrassed to ask the nurse about how to look after your new addition. Like babies, toilet training has to be done and your new pet will have to learn the rules of the house. Nurses are there to help and will have heard even the most embarrassing fact about your pet's poo before.



Laura Fiander doing a Puppy check

Diets are something you should take advice on. There are plenty of foods in the supermarkets that look fantastic and we've all seen the adverts. The correct nutrition is so important in the first few months of life and not all diets which claim to be puppy or kitten diets actually provide the right balance of nutrients for your pet's growth and development. We are feeding Mikki "Hills feline growth" diet and will do so until she is about a year old when she will graduate to an adult maintenance die. Mikki has her own views on this subject and seems quite determined to have either Molly's food or even Meg's! Many diets, while appearing cheaper, may in fact prove more expensive over time as they have a lower density of nutrients which means your pet will have to eat more to get the same benefit.

Microchip your animal! Mikki was "chipped" painlessly a couple of weeks ago when she was under anaesthetic for neutering and only last week our long suffering practice manager had to take a stray dog to the council's kennels because it was not chipped and we could not find the owner. It costs between £15 and £20 to microchip your pet and if your pet gets lost at least you will know that you will probably get it back again. I believe it is a small price to pay for the peace of mind, that should she get lost, at least she is identifiable to anyone who may find her.



A Microchip

Ask about getting your pet neutered. I know it is tough to think about your new little bundle of fluff and fur and then think about taking it to the surgery for an operation. The truth is unless you intend to breed from your pet you are not doing your pet any favours by not having it neutered. In dogs for example there are beneficial behavioural effects resulting from neutering, in bitches there are significantly reduced risks of mammary tumours and it eliminates any risk of pyometra (a disease of the uterus). Both are expensive, potentially life threatening conditions. Unless your cat is a pure bred show cat there is every likelihood that, loveable as it may be, its kittens will be of small monetary value. You only have to talk to the charity Cat Protection to discover how many cats there are roaming the streets that are unwanted and unloved. Last year the charity Cat Protection re-homed 55,000 cats and that is only the tip of the iceberg. Most of these cats started off as kittens from a cat of someone who thought it would be nice to have one litter before neutering, but then never got around to organising the operation afterwards.



Insurance – we all know the benefits of insurance, especially owners that find themselves facing a large bill. If your pet becomes ill always ask your vet to estimate the cost of any procedure, but remember it is an estimate not a quote, sometimes during the operation other problems may present themselves. Insurance may not be cheap, and often you get what you pay for but shop around, ask your vet. One of the benefits of insurance is not just

the protection from large bills it is also the peace of mind you get from knowing you will not have to worry about whether you can afford the best treatment or not.

Think about puppy training classes, this will not just help you train your pet in and around the home; it will help bond your puppy to you and get your puppy comfortable and confident around other dogs without being aggressive or uncontrollable. This is obviously more difficult with cats, but again the nurses can advise you on house training. I am sure you are aware how independent cats can be. I have three in the house it is difficult to work out if I adopted them or the other way around. The kitten seems to have ousted Meg our dog from her bed.



puppy socialisation class

The Visit to the vet for the booster vaccination is an excellent time for the vet to check over your pet's development and check all the normal things should be checked; eyes, ears, teeth and claws, weight, coat etc. One of the things that alarms me most about vaccinations is the amount of people who have the primary vaccination when their pet is a puppy or kitten but then don't ever have the boosters. Dog diseases such as distemper, canine hepatitis, Parvo virus, leptospirosis, para influenza virus and in cats Leukaemia, pancytopenia or cat flu don't go away. The fact that these diseases are not as common as they were 20 years ago is a result of widespread vaccination, but we need to keep it that way. Those owners who do not keep up their animals vaccinations are not just putting their pets at real risk of a fatal disease, but are also making the eradication of these diseases less likely.

It may all sound scary and expensive but by making sure you do things right at the beginning, you will save yourself money and heartache in the end. Having Mikki around has reinforced the immense pleasure derived from having a new young pet- BUT – with that pleasure comes the total responsibility for the welfare of that animal for the WHOLE of its life. Don't allow them to suffer through lack of knowledge or forethought. There we go Lecture over! Happy new year everyone and I hope you get as much pleasure from your pets as we are from Mikki Mokki.



Mikki asleep