

Some Helpful tips for **MEDICATING FERAL KITTENS**

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With sickly feral kittens try to use your vets most effective but least traumatic treatment available. Forcibly restraining the kittens unnecessarily to medicate them will set back the socialization process and sometimes make a timely socialization impossible.

Along with medical treatment remember to feed the most nutritious food possible. A healthy immune system can combat most ailments but needs premium quality food to feul the battle. Petguard, Wellness, Nutro, Eukanuba are among the best for nutrition. Friskies and Wiskas are inferior but the better of the grocery store brands. Stay away from grocery store brands when you have a sick cat. The moisture from wet food is much preferable to dry food.

(Disclaimer: give a sick cat whatever it wants, if it's a battle to just get it eating)

Building a healthy immune response through a top quality diet can often heal a feral cat you can't handle safely to medicate properly. Here are some of the simpler medical treatment options which don't require stressful or traumatic handling:

FLEAS:

When safe-handling is impossible, forget about a flea bath! CAPSTAR pills crushed in food are a safe and effective flea treatment for cats and kittens 4 weeks and older. A half pill is the safe dose for 4-8 week old kittens. Capstar does not require a prescription and can be purchased online at any of the PetMeds-type websites, or some pet supply stores. Capstar kills fleas in 3-6 hours at which time the cat/kitten may be brought anywhere without fear of risking flea infestation if you dispose of the old infested bedding. The pills can be crushed and sprinkled onto a small amount of a tasty food. They have no unpleasant taste. Capstar has no residual effect so the cat/kitten must not be re-exposed to fleas. It does not kill eggs on the cat so follow up with a long-acting topical treatment when you can handle the kittens safely. Advantage, Revolution, Frontline, etc. continue working for one month). IF you find you CAN handle the kittens in time, a bath with Dawn dish-washing detergent kills fleas on contact. Sometimes a flea comb dipped in the soapy water is enough to comb out a few fleas. Put a soapy ring around the neck and anus at the start to prevent the fleas from escaping into ears and you know where.

EAR MITES:

REVOLUTION requires a prescription but will effectively treat Ear-Mites; (it also treats fleas and roundworms at the same time). Briefly handling of the cat/kitten is necessary to squeeze a small amount of the Revolution liquid onto the cat's skin between the shoulder blades. This can be done at the time of a vet exam or after the Spay/Neuter surgery. Other EAR MITE treatments require fourteen days of twice daily ear drops with a refrigerated product like TRESADERM. This is stressful and traumatic for fearful kittens. Cold ear drops twice a day for two weeks is not a good recipe for socialization. Some say Revolution needs two treatments, but in the right dose, it has worked well for us every time. The vet can clean and treat the ears with Acares or Ivermectin to kill the mites when the kittens get their Spay/Neuter surgery if you can't treat before then. Ear mites are contagious and uncomfortable, but not life threatening. If you find you must wait for a vet visit to get them treated the kittens will be ok to wait a bit, but treat a.s.a.p.

VIRAL INFECTIONS:

Treating eye infections can be very difficult but must not be neglected. Scarring and loss of vision is common with untreated Herpes virus eye infections (Herpes is the R in the FVRCP vaccination). Make sure you have the correct diagnosis since treating with the wrong eye medication can be useless or even harmful. Let the vet prescribe the eye med since you could do harm with the wrong one. For example: if the surface of the eye has been harmed, a steroid ointment could cause permanent damage. If you are required to use the standard tubes of eye ointment (Terramycin, Vetpolymycin, etc.) or drops, be sure to undo the bad experience of being restrained and treated for the eye problem.

Terramycin ointment is said to be the most effective against Herpes however it also stings the most. If the eyes aren't in too, too bad shape, the vet may agree that gentler drops and gentle cleaning may be enough rather than the irritating terramycin. If the tip of the tube touches the eye, you may spread the virus to everyone else you treat with that tube. Ideally each patient has their own tube which is thrown away after treatment. If this is financially impossible, take your time and be extra careful. Spend extra nurturing time with the kittens before and after treating the eyes with the proper eye ointment or drops. Antibiotics have no direct effect (read about Zithromax below) on viral infections like URI (Upper Respiratory Infection) but often vets will prescribe one to treat or prevent a secondary bacterial infection. This is usually easily mixed into food without handling the cat. Make sure you can follow the directions precisely or don't treat the cat at all. Antibiotics are not a "hit or miss" medication to be played around with. Ask the vet if you're not sure! Kittens with URI that are bouncing around and playing and most importantly eating normally, may not need an antibiotic at all.

Zithromax (Azithromycin), has been found to be very effective for resolving kitten and adult Herpes eye infections. Although it is an antibiotic and we all know they can't cure viral infections, vets are documenting that an Azithromycin course of treatment often resolves Herpes eye infections. Azithromycin can be compounded with flavors and stirred into food, avoiding the need to restrain the animal to treat it. It can be ordered with a prescription from VetCentric.com and mailed to you if your vet or pharmacy doesn't do compounding. The medicine itself is not perishable but some of the flavor compounds are and need to be refrigerated, so try to stick with the non-perishable flavorings. We use the "Roasted Chicken" and not the perishable "Tuna" which needs refrigeration. The success of this treatment for herpes is unexplained and "off-label" so your vet may not be aware of this seemingly miraculous if counter-intuitive treatment. When eye ointment treatments are impossible, Azithromycin could save the day. It can also be used as the preventative treatment for a secondary bacterial infection. There is another drug Famciclovir which you may ask your vet about for a difficult viral or herpes eye infection.

PARASITES:

Most vets give STRONGID for ROUNDWORMS as a matter of course (must be repeated once 14-21 days after first treatment). This can easily be put in food and gobbled up without detection. Strongid is a very effective and safe medicine but will not resolve other parasites such as COCCIDIA or GIARDIA. These others are less frequently seen, but very common. Diarrhea can be very serious to kitten health and should not be neglected. An exact diagnosis can be difficult to get but if diarrhea persists, take a stool sample to your vet for testing. The test for Giardia is more expensive and not normally run as a matter of routine. Be sure to ask the vet if he thinks it is necessary and offer to pay the extra to have it done. The routine treatment for Giardia is 10-14 days, twice per day of a very bitter drug

called Metronidazol or Flagyl. It is impossible to disguise this drug in food and usually makes the most tame housecat impossible to pill after one taste. One company has started making the drug in coated pill form but most Vets only stock the large dog size pill that breaks into powder when you dose it for cats. A better alternative for treating Giardia in the feral cat or kitten is Panacur liquid suspension. It comes in powder but the liquid is easier to mix in with food. It has a chalky taste which gives you a much better chance of sneaking it into food. It's a once per day treatment for only 5 days which is much shorter than the bitter pill regimen. Whenever diarrhea is present, feed a high fiber cat food like W/D to physically push out as many of the parasites as possible. Adding unspiced canned pumpkin to the food can add fiber to canned food. High fiber food may sometimes be enough to clear up a simple case of diarrhea but be ready to get a proper diagnosis and treat with meds if the diarrhea persists.

RINGWORM:

One of my professors told me, "It takes 21 days for Ringworm to heal if you treat it and 3 weeks if you don't treat it." I once treated a young feral kitten for ringworm with sulphur dips which terrified her. As a result, she was never comfortable being handled. Her sister was too feral for the vet techs to even handle for the treatments, and she healed on her own with good nutrition in the same amount of time. One effective oral drug we've used, Itraconazole can be flavored at the Pharmacy and you can sneak it into the food for ferals. For years PROGRAM, a flea treatment, was being used to treat Ringworm. It appeared to cure some strains of Ringworm but the recent vet literature says it doesn't work at all. For hard to treat ferals, we recommend you target good nutrition to build a curative immune system response if a vet treatment is impossible. It does resolve in time.

ANTIBIOTICS: Ever try to give antibiotics twice a day to a feral cat? If you have, you'll be jumping for joy as you read this news. There is an "off label" use for cefovecin (Convenia™) which allows a one-time injection that provides 7-14 days of antibiotic treatment for cats. This means that a feral cat which is discovered to have an infected wound or need teeth pulled at the time of TNR could get this one shot while still knocked-out for the neutering, and not need the twice daily regimen of antibiotics we've all faced in the past. It's termed "Off-label use" because Cefovecin (Convenia™), has only been tested and approved for treating dermatological problems but doctors have found that it works for many other things AND has the aforementioned 7-14 days of residual effect. Studies have shown that the only side effects (rarely seen) may be some nausea for a couple days but don't last for the entire 7-14 days.

If your vet doesn't understand the challenges of socialization and building the kitten's trust, there are many other vets who do and will work with you to get the kittens to optimal health without using treatment methods that undo your hard work toward socialization. Ask around for a recommendation from one of the many groups working with feral cats.

In NYC get a referral from The Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals.

The kittens AND YOU, deserve all the help and understanding you can get!!

Check the urbanleague.org socialization page for an easy pdf print-out of this hand-out