

# Kitten Basics 101

## Taking Care of Your New Kitten



Raising a kitten is one of the most fun things you'll ever do, but it's also a big responsibility. The following guide will walk you through the basics of how to take care of that playful, purring bundle of fur.

Kittens are so cute, it's understandable that cat owners sometimes wish their kittens could stay kittens forever. This is the when you, as the pet parent, lay the foundation for your cat's future health and behavior. Not to mention, it's the stage where you have to decide what food to buy, what vet to visit, and where to place the litterbox. Fortunately, all of your hard work during these first few months is compensated by loads of snuggling and adorability.

### **1. Verify Your Kitten's Age**

Though it's not something you have any control over, your kitten's age is more than just a number. In fact, it's crucial that you learn it. Kittens have very specific developmental needs for the first 10 weeks of their lives in terms of nourishment, warmth, socialization, and excretion. For this reason, most breeders and shelters typically wait until their kittens are of age before they're put up for adoption. If you, by chance, find yourself in a situation where you need to care for an orphaned kitten under 10 weeks old, consult your vet for special instructions.

### **2. Find a Good Vet**

If you don't have a vet in mind already, ask friends for recommendations. If you got your cat from a shelter, ask their advice as they may have veterinarians they swear by. Local dog walkers and groomers are also a great resource for pet recommendations.

One of the first things you should do with your new cat, if not the very first, is take him in for an exam. This trip is almost as important for the owner as it is the kitten, because it not only tests for health issues like birth defects, parasites, and feline leukemia, but it allows you to ask those all important questions including advice on litterbox training your kitten.

### **3. Get the Most Out of Your First Vet Visit**

1. Have your vet recommend a type of food, how often to feed, and portion sizes.
2. Discuss kitten-safe options for controlling parasites, both external and internal.
3. Learn about possible signs of illness to watch for during your kitten's first few months.
4. Discuss how to introduce your kitten to other household pets.
5. Schedule future visits and vaccinations to establish a preventive health plan for your kitten.

### **4. Shop for Quality Food**

Feeding a kitten isn't as easy as grabbing a bag of cat chow at the nearest convenience store. Growing kittens need as much as three times more calories and nutrients than adult cats. That's why it's important to find a good quality food designed especially for kittens. A name brand food, formulated for kittens, is the simplest way to ensure that your kitty gets the proper nourishment without supplements. Also, check to make sure your kitten's food includes a statement from the Association of Animal Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) displayed on the packaging, ensuring the food is nutritionally complete.

### **5. Set Up a Feeding Schedule**

To keep up with your kitten's appetite, you'll want to establish a daily feeding routine. The best way to ensure that you're not under or over-feeding your kitten is to consult with your veterinarian about how much and how often to feed. At 3 to 6 months of age, most vets recommend feeding your kitten three times a day. Once he's reached six months, you can scale it back to twice a day. Keep stocking your pantry with kitten food until your baby reaches adulthood, 9 to 12 months old. In addition, don't forget to keep his water bowl fresh and filled at all times. But hold the milk. Contrary to popular belief, milk is not nutritionally sufficient for kittens and can give them diarrhea.

Get advice on the best way to litterbox train your kitten.

### **6. Be Sociable**

Once your vet has cleared your kitten as free of disease and parasites, it's safe to let your new kitten explore its new surroundings and other pet roommates. Handling and playing with your kitten at least once a day will help him form a strong emotional bond with you. If you have children, monitor their introduction to the new kitten to make sure it's a positive experience for both the kitten and child.

### **7. Prepare a Room**

Before you bring your kitten home, it's best to designate a quiet area where the kitten can feel comfortable and safe. In this base camp, you'll need to put a few essentials like food and water dishes, a litterbox (preferably one with low sides), and some comfortable bedding. Tip: Remember, cats don't like their food and litterbox too close together. So place the food dishes as far away from the litter as possible within the space.

### **8. Gear Up**

Here's a list of the most essential items you'll want to have before bringing your kitten home:

1. Quality food, specifically formulated for kittens
2. Collar and ID tags

3. Food bowls, preferably metal or ceramic
4. Litterbox and cat litter
5. A comfortable, warm cat bed
6. Cat carrier
7. Scratching post
8. Kitten safe toys, no small pieces that your kitten can swallow
9. Cat brush
10. Cat toothbrush and toothpaste (get him started at a young age)

## 9. Watch for Early Signs of Illness

Young kittens are more susceptible to a number of illnesses, and it's always best to catch a health issue in its early stages. Contact your vet immediately if your kitten displays any of the following symptoms.

1. Lack of appetite
2. Poor weight gain
3. Vomiting
4. Swollen or painful abdomen
5. Lethargy (tiredness)
6. Diarrhea
7. Difficulty breathing
8. Wheezing or coughing
9. Pale gums
10. Swollen, red eyes or eye discharge
11. Nasal discharge
12. Inability to pass urine or stool

*This article has been reviewed by a Veterinarian.*

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February 27, 2014

