

# Caring for Your New Kitten

- Kittens should be fed a nutritionally complete, name-brand kitten food with the American Association of Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) statement on the bag or label. Proper nutrition is especially important for kittens, which need two to three times as many calories and nutrients as adult cats.
- Don't give regular cow's milk to kittens because it doesn't contain the protein and nutrients that kittens need and it can give them (and adult cats) diarrhea.
- Your kitten must receive veterinary care before being introduced to other cats.
- Your kitten must be vaccinated against various diseases according to a schedule, beginning at 2 to 3 months of age.
- Kittens should be spayed or neutered by 6 months of age. This helps to control pet overpopulation and reduces the chances of some behavioral and medical problems.

During the first 8 to 10 weeks of life, kittens have specific needs for nourishment, warmth, socialization, and excretion. If you find orphaned kittens younger than 8 to 10 weeks of age, take them to a veterinarian immediately. Your veterinarian can give you advice on caring for them and might be able to give you contact information for animal rescue groups.

The following information pertains to caring for kittens that are at least 8 to 10 weeks of age, the time at which they can safely be taken from their mother and littermates. For optimal social development, a kitten should remain with its mother and/or littermates until 12 weeks of age. A kitten that is taken from its mother before weaning is complete may develop the troublesome behavior of suckling on nearby items or fingers.

### Feeding

Proper nutrition is especially important for kittens, which need two to three times as many calories and nutrients as adult cats. Kittens should be fed a name-brand, nutritionally complete kitten food with

the American Association of Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) statement on the bag or label. This ensures that the food is nutritionally balanced for kittens. Kitten food should be fed until adulthood, which begins between 9 to 12 months of age.

Consult your veterinarian for the exact amount to feed and for help creating a long-term feeding schedule suited to your kitten's needs. When your kitten is 3 to 6 months old, feed him or her three times per day. When your kitten is 6 months old, you may consider feeding twice daily.

Cow's milk should never be given to kittens or cats because it is nutritionally inadequate and can give them diarrhea.

Clean, fresh water should be available at all times and changed at least daily.

### Kitten Supplies

- Brand-name, nutritionally complete kitten food with the American Association of Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) statement on the bag or label
- Food and water bowls; ceramic and metal are preferred because some pets are sensitive to plastic
- Cat toys that don't have small parts or string that can come off and be swallowed
- Cat brush; brush your kitten gently twice weekly (daily for long-haired cats)
- Cat toothpaste and toothbrush; it's best to start toothbrushing during kittenhood; aim for at least three times per week
- Breakaway collar and identification tag
- Scratching post and/or pad; when your kitten uses it, reward him or her with praise and/or a feline treat
- Litterbox
- Litter; low-dust, unscented, nonclumping litter is best
- Cat carrier
- Cat bed

## Caring for Your New Pet

### Veterinary Care

Your kitten should have a physical examination by a veterinarian as soon as possible. This examination can provide an opportunity to (1) identify birth defects and other health issues, (2) address questions about feeding and other home care, and (3) schedule a preventive health plan.

To prevent the spread of a disease or parasites, your kitten should be separated from all other household pets for a quarantine period of at least a few weeks. During this time, your veterinarian should test your kitten for parasites and infectious diseases such as feline leukemia virus and feline immunodeficiency virus—especially if this testing was not performed before you obtained your kitten. Observe your kitten closely for any signs of illness. Any problems should be reported to your veterinarian before introducing your kitten to your other pets. Contact your veterinarian immediately if your kitten has any of the following:

- Lack of appetite
- Poor weight gain
- Vomiting
- Swollen or painful abdomen
- Lack of activity
- Diarrhea
- Difficulty breathing
- Coughing or wheezing
- Constant or frequent crying
- Pale gums
- Swollen, red eyes or eye discharge
- Nasal discharge
- Inability to pass urine or stool

Your kitten must be vaccinated against various diseases according to a schedule, beginning at 2 to 3 months of age.

Intestinal parasites are common in kittens. Fecal examinations and treatments (dewormings) are usually repeated until two consecutive fecal examinations have negative results. External parasites (fleas, ticks, and mites) are treated with products approved for use on kittens. Ask your veterinarian for details.

Your kitten should be spayed or neutered by 6 months of age. This helps to control pet overpopulation and reduces the chance of some behavior problems and medical conditions.

### Socialization

After the quarantine period discussed above, your kitten can be gradually introduced to other pets with care and supervision. Ask your veterinarian for advice on the best way to do this.

Handling and playing with your kitten daily can help you bond with him or her. Monitor children closely to help prevent injury to the kitten or family members.

Your kitten must be vaccinated against various diseases according to a schedule, beginning at 2 to 3 months of age.

### Creature Comforts

Before you bring your kitten home, prepare a small room or space that will be his or her own for the first few days or weeks. Even if you don't have to quarantine your kitten from other pets, having a small area to explore at first will help your kitten get comfortable with his or her new home.

Cats don't like to eat next to the litterbox, so place the litterbox on one side of the room and the food and water dishes on the other. Make sure that your kitten can get in and out of the litterbox without help; it might be necessary to provide a litterbox with low sides.

To help your kitten feel secure, make sure that the room has hiding places. If there isn't furniture to hide beneath, place cardboard boxes on their sides or cut doorways into them.

Providing a warm, comfortable bed is essential. You can purchase a pet bed or line a box with something soft; using a sweatshirt that you've worn will help your kitten get used to your scent.

Enjoy your new kitten, and let your veterinarian know if you have any questions.