

Charting Your Kitty's Development

Published by Jean Marie Bauhaus, July 23, 2018

1 – 3 Weeks: Kittens Open Their Eyes and Ears



Kittens come into the world with their eyes and ears closed and spend the first week or so of their lives blind and deaf. Their eyes open during the second week, but their vision isn't very good at this point, and they'll need to be kept out of bright light, says [The Spruce Pets](#). The blue eyes that kittens are born with may start to change color during their third week, which is also when their ears begin to open and perk up, introducing them to a whole new world filled with sound.

Kittens have the ability to make sounds from birth, and may be heard making little meows to let their mother know they're hungry, says [Catster](#). Purring typically begins during week three, and kittens tend to become more vocal as they start being able to walk, play and explore their surroundings.

3 – 5 Weeks: Walking and Using the Litter Box

Around three weeks of age is usually when kittens start to take their first shaky steps. While they start out wobbly and unsure, as balance begins to

improve during the fourth week they become more confident and eager to explore their surroundings. This is a good time to start [kitten-proofing your home](#) if you haven't already done so.

During the fourth and fifth week of the kitten timeline, kittens are able to balance enough to go to the bathroom without any help from their mother. This is a good time to introduce them to the litter box, says [Petful](#). Kittens typically learn what to do from watching mom, so all you really need to do is show them the box. Just keep in mind that they're still learning and accidents might happen from time to time.

6 – 8 Weeks: Socializing and First Vaccines

By five weeks of age, kittens are confident enough in their newfound mobility that they become curious and playful, making it an excellent time to start socializing them. Playing and cuddling with the kittens, introducing them to other people and pets, letting them explore their surroundings (under close supervision, of course) and experience new sights, sounds and smells will not only prepare them to go to their eventual forever homes but also help them grow into emotionally healthy, well-adjusted adult cats.

Your kitten should be taken to her first veterinarian visit during this time. The first round of vaccinations should be done between six and eight weeks on the kitten timeline. The core immunizations she'll need include distemper and the respiratory diseases, feline viral rhinotracheitis and feline calicivirus. Your veterinarian will place your kitten on a schedule for follow-up shots and boosters, and also discuss any additional shots for conditions she may be at risk for, including chlamydia and feline leukemia. By twelve weeks, kittens are ready to receive their first rabies vaccination.

Did you know kittens have two sets of teeth as they age, just like humans? Feline baby teeth start coming in during the second week, but your kitten should have all of her baby teeth by about eight weeks of age. By four months, her adult teeth will start to come in.

9 – 12 Weeks: Weaning and Learning Cat Skills

Kittens can be introduced to solid food during their fifth week, although they'll continue nursing for a few weeks after this. According to [Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine](#), some vets even recommend offering Mama Kitty the same kitten food while she's nursing, since its high protein and fat

content will help her recover and stay healthy. By the ninth week, your kittens will finish the transition to solid food and should be fed quality [kitten food](#).

How much and how often they eat will depend on whether you feed them canned or dry food. Canned food should be given in small amounts four times daily until they are three months old, after which it should be cut back to three times a day, says the [Cornell Feline Health Center](#). When kittens are six months old, you can transition them to eating twice a day. If you are giving them dry food, you can simply leave a dish of food out and allow kittens to free feed when they're hungry, but in this case you'll need to monitor their weight to make sure they're not overeating.

In between eating and snuggling, kittens that are just a few weeks old are learning one important thing: how to act like a cat. [The Spruce Pets](#) notes that kittens need to be raised by their mother or a foster cat in order to learn the basics of hunting, kitty communication, playing with fellow cats and using a litter box.



3 – 6 Months: Ready for Adoption and Neutering

Kittens shouldn't be separated from their mother and littermates until they have been fully weaned and socialized. Kittens continue learning normal cat behavior from their mother until well into their tenth week, says Petful, so in order to give each kitten the best chance of becoming a well-adjusted cat, it's best to wait until at least ten weeks before allowing her to go to a new home. You can also wait twelve weeks to allow time for the next important round of vaccinations in the kitten timeline.

Kittens are ready to be [spayed or neutered](#) by six months of age. Many vets, however, will perform the procedure as early as eight weeks if the kitten weighs enough to safely undergo general anesthesia.

One Year: No Longer a Kitten

By the time she reaches her first birthday, a [kitten is no longer considered a kitten](#) but is now a full-grown cat. Although she may still engage in kittenish behavior and may still have some additional growing to do, your newly adult cat is ready to transition to a high-quality adult cat food formula. Follow the recommended feeding guidelines on your kitty's new cat food to determine how much and how often she should be fed.

Although a cat is considered an adult by one year of age, developmentally speaking, kitten adolescence typically lasts until a cat reaches eighteen months or so. During this time, a cat might still exhibit the energetic playfulness of a kitten, as well as typical "teenager" behavior, which may include testing boundaries and acts of rebellion like scratching the furniture or marking territory. According to the kitten growth chart at [Raising Happy Kittens](#), your kitty may become less affectionate during this time. But not to worry. Usually, cats start to mature and settle down after the eighteen-month mark, and by her second birthday your kitty will be fully grown into her adult personality.

Watching a kitten grow from a tiny newborn to a full-grown cat is a wondrous thing. Knowing what to expect as your kitten grows will empower you to help her grow into a healthy and happy companion.