



**Eat well.**  
**Play more.**  
**Live longer.**

Give your kitten all the ingredients  
for a healthy, happy life.

**#WeighUp**



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# Give your kitten the perfect start in life!

**We know how exciting it is to welcome a new kitten into your home. Equally, we understand how daunting it can feel to be responsible for their health and happiness. Diet and exercise plays a big part in ensuring your kitten has a great start in life, so we've produced this guide to help you.**

Overweight cats tend to have shorter lifespans, and are at a much higher risk of developing serious disease later in life. Worryingly, our 2021 PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report found that 3% of kitten owners already feel that their pet is overweight, which could be setting them up for health problems in the future.

The first few months of your kitten's life are vital. To give them the best start in life, we need to help them to stay at a healthy weight.

## Lay the foundations for a happy and healthy future

Start as you mean to go on - if you feed your kitten the right amount of a high quality kitten Food and give them the correct amount of exercise from day one, they're more likely to be the perfect weight and grow into a happy, fit adult cat. Cats that aren't used to regular exercise and the correct diet for their age and lifestyle tend to gain weight, develop health problems as they age, and may find it difficult to adapt to a change in lifestyle later on if they need to lose weight.

Visit our  
Pet Health Hub  
for expert advice  
on how to care  
for your pet  
[here](#)

## We can make a difference

By working together, we can give our pets the best start so they can go on to live long, happy, healthy lives.

This handy guide features diet, exercise and behaviour advice to help your kitten grow into a healthy cat.

Obese cats  
may have their  
lifespan shortened by  
1.9 years compared  
to cats at an ideal  
weight\*



\* Teng KT et al. Strong associations of 9-point body condition scoring with survival and life span in cats. J Feline Med Surg 2018;1-9



## Eat well...

**Kittens need a balanced diet and the correct amount of food to help them grow into healthy adult cats.**

They have different nutritional needs at each stage of their development, so it's essential you choose the right food to support them – from when they first come home to you at eight weeks old to when they are fully grown.

### What should I feed my kitten?

Kittens need a good quality, commercially available complete food made especially for them – a specific kitten food designed to meet their nutritional needs and support their development. Look for the Pet Food Manufacturers Association label – members of this organisation meet extra quality standards above the legal minimum.

Complete kitten food is available as wet or dry - we recommend feeding a mixture of both food types. Offer wet food at mealtimes so any leftovers can be discarded before they go off and provide dry food as a snack in between meals.

Visit our [PDSA Pet Store](#) to buy kitten food.

#### Kitten feeding... Wet food and dry food



##### Wet food

- Provides moisture
- Very palatable
- Can't be left out

##### Dry food

- Easier to use in puzzle feeders
- Can be left out for kittens to graze
- Doesn't provide additional moisture

## Before you bring your kitten home

Ask your kitten's breeder:

### Did you know

Kittens need kitten food. Adult cat food does not contain the nutrients your kitten needs for growth.

- ✓ What food are they used to eating?
- ✓ How many times a day do they eat?
- ✓ What time of day do they eat?
- ✓ How much food are they eating?

Continue with the same food and routine when your kitten first comes home - they can get upset tummies from sudden diet changes.

If you want to change your kitten's diet:

- Give them a few weeks to settle in their new home before making any changes.
- Take it slowly, offer just a small amount of the new food at first.
- Gradually increase the amount of new food offered and reduce their old diet.
- Aim to make the change over 7-14 days.

### Did you know

Cats have much fewer taste buds than us, so the actual flavour of their food may be less important to them than other factors such as texture.





## How much and how often should I feed my kitten?

Kittens have small tummies, so their daily food allowance needs to be split into several small meals fed regularly throughout the day. The feeding guide on your kitten food pack will tell you how much they need for their age. Weigh this out and split into portions - using digital scales to weigh your kitten's food is a lot more accurate than using a measuring cup.

Feeding wet food two or three times a day with dry food in between can make this easier for you - just remember not to go over their daily allowance!

### Did you know

When given the choice, cats are grazers and would rather eat around 14 small meals a day. Allowing them to eat this way when young helps to reduce overeating as an adult.

### Giving your kitten\*...



**A SAUCER OF MILK**

...is like you having  
**3 vanilla ice cream shakes**

\*Based on 1kg kitten



## How about a saucer of milk?

Our vets recommend you don't give kittens milk to drink. Cow's milk contains lactose, a type of sugar that cats find hard to digest, so can cause tummy upsets. All cats should be considered to be lactose intolerant.



## Treats for your kitten

Treats are ideal for reward-based training - that's right, kittens can be trained! Saving special treats for training provides an incentive for your kitten to learn good habits. To keep your kitten healthy, you will need to reduce the amount of food in their meals to compensate for the extra calories in treats - make sure to keep their diet balanced by only feeding up to 10% of their daily allowance as treats. Why not try using some of their daily biscuits or lower calorie treats for training?



## Human food scraps

Our vets advise you not to share your own meals and leftovers with your cat because:

- It can result in your kitten lacking vital nutrients.
- Many Foods are high in fat, sugar and salt.
- Kittens may refuse to eat their balanced diet.
- Some human foods are poisonous, e.g. chocolate, onions and garlic.
- It can encourage begging behaviour during mealtimes.



### A healthier option

A small piece of plain steamed chicken breast or a flake of tuna is a perfect reward and low in fat.

## Neutered kittens need fewer calories

Many people believe that neutering makes their pets fat - that's not quite the case. Neutered cats can be more prone to weight gain and generally need fewer calories, whilst also seeming to want to eat more. Diets designed specifically for neutered cats who are still growing will provide all the nutrients your cat needs while also helping them to feel more satisfied with fewer calories.

If your kitten is neutered at 4 months of age, they should stay on a kitten food until they are 6 months old, before switching to a neutered cat diet. If your kitty is looking for more food, try using puzzle feeders to slow down feeding time. Changing to a new food should still be done over 7-14 days to prevent upset tummies.

### Neutered cats need fewer calories



**Reduce by 30%\***

\*Guideline only, individual cat needs may vary



# Play more...

**Like us, exercise is vital to keep kittens mentally and physically fit and healthy.**

You don't need to take your kitten on 10-mile walks; playtime at home is perfect for them and will help you strike up an unbreakable bond too.

## Kittens love playtime

Pouncing, diving, and leaping are all natural behaviours for your new kitten. And as kittens need to stay inside until they're microchipped, vaccinated and neutered, playtime is an essential part of their development.

Play should be mentally stimulating to improve eye-paw coordination and help kittens explore their environment. Encouraging hunting behaviours through play should mean less incentive for your cat to do the real thing, so there's less chance of you waking up to little "presents" once they're able to go outside.

## Did you know

Kittens can be vaccinated from around nine weeks of age and neutered from four months.

## Play with your kitten...



in **10-15** minute bursts

## How much exercise do kittens need?

Aim for several short bursts of playtime through the day. Pick times when they're active and looking to explore - redirect that energy to some toys before they start climbing your curtains!

## When can your kitten go outside?

Kittens should stay inside until they're fully vaccinated and neutered to protect them from diseases and prevent unwanted litters. You should also get them microchipped before they go out to help you be reunited if they get lost.

## Your kitten's sleep

Young kittens also need lots of sleep. A kitten will be active and alert when they're ready to play, but once they start to lose interest, don't try to force them to carry on; let them take a well-earned rest to replenish their energy for more playtime later. Make sure they have a warm, comfortable bed somewhere quiet, away from busy walkways.

## Your kitten's favourite toys

Kittens love toys that mimic their prey, such as:



**Toy mice** moving around under a blanket.



**Feather toys** on a wand that encourage them to pounce. Take care not to leave them hanging from anywhere, your kitten could become entangled.



**Balls** rolling along the floor and under furniture.



**Soft toys** that they can attack.



**Laser pointers** to chase - be careful not to shine the light in their eyes. It is essential to give them something to catch afterwards, like a toy mouse, otherwise cats can develop behaviour problems due to frustration.

Visit the **PDSA Pet Store** for our range of cat toys.



## Top tip

Tiny kittens chasing your fingers and toes may seem cute, but try not to encourage this behaviour - it's much more painful when they're adults!



# Best behaviour

**The habits we help our kittens learn in their first few months can have a big impact on their future health and happiness.**

Cats are independent, curious and playful, but their behaviour can sometimes be a mystery to humans. Learning to understand our kitten's behaviour will mean we can help them grow into healthy adult cats.

## Scratching

Your kitten needs plenty of opportunities to scratch; it's part of their natural behaviour, keeps their claws in good condition, stretches their bodies and helps them mark their territory.

Kittens need a suitable scratching post so they can carry out this behaviour (without ruining your furniture!). The post should be high enough for your kitty to stretch up fully and sturdy enough not to wobble or fall over.

## Why does my cat scratch the floor near their food bowl?

If you've seen your kitten scratching by their food bowl, don't worry, this is perfectly normal. Cats in the wild cover their food (called 'caching') to prevent spoiling, avoid alerting predators, and stop others from eating their food - our domestic cats are likely displaying this instinctive behaviour.

### Did you know

Healthy kittens should be keen to eat. If your kitten doesn't want to eat for any reason, please contact your vet to check for any underlying health issues.

# Feeding time

Cats can be picky about how and where their food is served to them. They like to feel safe and not threatened while eating, with an escape route if needed.



**Put food bowls in a quiet area** away from windows and cat flaps; other cats looking in at them can make your kitten feel threatened. Make sure they can see all around them while they are eating to help them feel safe.



**Keep litter trays well away from food bowls** - cats don't like to eat near where they go to the toilet.



**Keep water and food bowls** at least half a metre apart, ideally in separate rooms. Wet and dry food should also be kept separate, not mixed into one bowl.



**Choose food bowls that are wide and shallow** so their faces and whiskers can fit inside and not brush against the edges.



**Use ceramic or metal bowls** rather than plastic.



**Many cats love to drink flowing water.** Indoor cat fountains are a great alternative to a bowl.



**Avoid strong or citrus-scented cleaners** that your cat might not like when cleaning their things. Wash with a pet-safe, scent-free cleaner and rinse well.



### Top tip

Use puzzle feeders and interactive hunting toys to make mealtimes more fun, slow down feeding and reduce overeating. You could also scatter food across the floor for your kitten to chase and spread wet food over lick mats.



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advice on looking  
after your pet

## #WeighUp

Visit our **Pet Health Hub**  
for expert advice on  
how to care for your pet

[www.pdsa.org.uk/weighup-phh](http://www.pdsa.org.uk/weighup-phh)

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