

Kitten

# Feeding Kittens



Growing kittens have higher calorie (energy) demands than adult cats. During the first six months, kittens require about twice as many calories per unit of body weight as adult cats. After 6 months of age, their energy demands decrease.

Nutrition should meet an individual kitten's unique nutritional needs for normal growth while maintaining a lean, healthy body condition. A kitten's body condition (using the Purina Body Condition System) should be periodically monitored at home and both body condition and weight should be evaluated during veterinary appointments.

## Key Messages

### What to feed?

- Kittens should be fed a complete and balanced growth diet (kitten food) until they reach full skeletal maturity, typically by 1 year of age.
- Kittens, like adult cats, are very sensitive to the form, odor, taste, texture and temperature of foods. Wet foods should be served at room temperature.
- Feeding kittens a variety of foods may help:
  - avoid food fixations (only eating certain foods)
  - prepare them in case a dietary change is required in later life
  - increase water intake when wet foods are fed
  - help with dental health, in the case of dry foods which are abrasive and help remove plaque
- Avoid giving cows' milk to kittens because it may cause diarrhea and digestive upset since kittens lose the ability to digest lactose (milk sugar).

### When to feed?

- Cats prefer small, frequent meals throughout the day. Although most growing kittens can self-regulate their calorie intake, portion-controlled feeding is recommended to minimize the risk of becoming overweight.
- Ideally, provide up to four small meals per day (divide the daily feeding amount into four portions) until the kitten is 6 months old.

- By 6 months of age, two meals per day is adequate. Check the feeding guidelines for the amount to feed for the kitten's age and monitor body condition to minimize risk of weight gain.

## How to feed?

- Use the feeding guidelines on the pet food package as a starting point for how much to feed. The amount can be adjusted to maintain optimal body condition.
- A kitchen/food scale can be used to weigh food in grams. In countries where feeding guidelines for dry foods are based on a 250-ml (8-oz.) measuring cup, use a dry-food (or ingredient) measuring cup matched to the amount of kibble needed.
- Kittens should be provided with their own feeding bowl. In multiple-cat homes, separate feeding stations should be located in different areas of the home to avoid confrontation or intimidation.
- When serving wet food, do not leave the food out for too long. Frequently providing fresh food increases the likelihood of the kitten accepting the food and decreases the risk of bacterial growth.
- Remember, all treats and other foods will contribute calories.

## Additional Resources

Armstrong, P. J., Gross, K. L., Becvarova, I., & Debraekeleer, J. (2010). Introduction to feeding normal cats. In M. S. Hand, C. D. Thatcher, R. L. Remillard, P. Roudebush, & B. J. Novotny (Eds.), *Small animal clinical nutrition* (5th ed., pp. 361–372). Mark Morris Institute.

Case, L. P., Daristotle, L., Hayek, M. G., & Raasch, M. F. (2011). *Canine and feline nutrition: A resource for companion animal professionals* (3rd ed.). Mosby Elsevier.

Lawler, D. F. (2008). Neonatal and pediatric care of the puppy and kitten. *Theriogenology*, 70(3), 384-392. doi: 10.1016/j.theriogenology.2008.04.019

Linder, D. E. (2017). Diets for each life stage. *Clinician's Brief*. <https://www.cliniciansbrief.com/article/diets-each-life-stage>

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