

Dear Tabby

Experts answer your questions about kittens in terms that humans can understand.

Marty Becker, DVM, and Janice Willard, DVM

I am 5 weeks old and I've started eating solid food. My cat mama's humans are talking about finding me and my kitten siblings new homes. But I don't want to leave mama yet. When is a good time for me to leave the nest?

"I don't blame you for wanting to stay with Mom for a bit longer Mom-cat is much more than just a snack bar," said Amy D. Shojai, author of "Complete Kitten Care."

"There are some really good reasons for you to stay where you are a while longer. Professional cat breeders and many behaviorists recommend waiting until you are 12 to 16 weeks old because that allows your emotional health and social skills to mature more fully. A number of problem behaviors often develop in kittens that leave the nest too early. Humans just aren't as good as cats at teaching important manners, and you have a lot to learn. Your humans shouldn't worry about an older kitten not bonding as closely; the truth is, even adult cats become very strongly attached to loving people, and a 12- to 16-week-old baby is just as loving as a younger one. Of course, in shelter situations, sometimes it's not possible for kittens to stay with Mom for that long. When you must go to a new family before you're 12 to 16 weeks of age, your humans must take steps to help you learn proper kitten etiquette: how to inhibit biting and clawing, proper litterbox use and all the other important feline must-knows."

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