

Kitten Care: The Easy Way

With preparation and information, bringing up baby is a breeze.

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Kittens can be a lot of fun but they are also a lot of work. Monitoring your new kitten's activities, providing proper nutrition and teaching it how to behave all lead to a healthy, well-mannered cat.

Where Do I Start? Start with a good foundation for growth kitten food. Feed your kitten a high-quality dry diet formulated specifically for kittens from weaning to about 1 year of age. Add canned kitten food once or twice a day for variety. Exposing your kitten to various flavors and textures early on helps prevent finicky eaters. Arnold Plotnick, DVM, an internal medicine and feline specialist in New York City, recommends feeding kittens free choice making dry kitten food always available because kittens expend lots of energy and need to eat frequently to replenish it. Plotnick sees few problems feeding kittens free choice. "Occasionally, I run into a kitten that's getting a little pudgy, and those cats need to be fed via timed feedings." Your veterinarian can tell you if your kitten gains too much weight. Offer fresh water at all times. Most kittens readily drink water and keep themselves hydrated. However, if your kitten doesn't drink very much, try different types of water bowls (plastic, glass, ceramic) in various sizes and locations around the house. Also try different types of water bottled, filtered, distilled or refrigerated. Some cats prefer moving water, and fountains are available at most pet stores and online. Veterinary Care Your kitten will have frequent vet visits during its first year. Vaccinations and deworming begin at 6 to 8 weeks of age, and altering surgery may be performed around this time. Core vaccines (those recommended for all cats) include herpes, calicivirus and panleukopenia, all repeated at 10 and 12 weeks of age, and a rabies vaccine is given at 4 months of age. Non-core vaccines include feline leukemia virus (FeLV), feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV), giardia and chlamydia. Ask your veterinarian which vaccines are appropriate for your cat. Indoor-only cats require fewer vaccines and less frequent vaccination than outdoor cats.