



All About Kitten Nutrition

Got questions about how and what to feed your new kitten?
We've got answers!

BY ARDEN MOORE

The first year of a cat's life may seem to pass by like a blur, but what and how often you feed can be critical to your kitten's overall health and longevity. In their first year, most kitties weigh just about 5 ounces by the first week, with many reaching their adult weight of about 10 to 12 pounds by their 1st birthdays.

"By the time they hit a year old, they are comparable to teenagers in human years," says Colorado veterinarian Dr. Jean Hofve, who operates the littlebigcat.com site and is the author of *What Cats Should Eat: A Holistic Veterinarian's Guide to Your Cat's Optimal Diet*.

Introduce textures & flavors

Once weaned, the focus is exposing fast-growing kittens to a variety of foods in a variety of textures, Dr. Hofve says. "Don't stick to one brand or one flavor, because you don't want your kitten to become fussy or finicky."

Dr. Kathryn Primm, owner of the Applebrook Animal Hospital in Tennessee and the country's first Fear



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Free Pets certified veterinarian, adds, “I like to expose kittens to different forms of diet — dry and canned — so during their socialization period, they learn to recognize different textures and tastes. It may pay off later if they need a special diet because of a disease process.”

To avoid any digestive upset or food rejection when introducing new food textures and flavors, follow the 3:3:3 rule. “Feed one-third new food and two-thirds current food for three days, then one-half of each for three days and then one-third of the old food with two-thirds of the new food for three days when making the switch,” Dr. Primm says. “Make the gradual switch to adult food by the time your kitten is 1.”

Dig in to ingredients

There is no one-diet-fits-all for kittens, but they all need diets that offer quality proteins, fats and carbohydrates to ensure they develop properly. Dr. Hofve recommends that the brand should contain between 45 to 50% →

BOTTLE BABY FORMULA FACTS

Let's address the itty-bitty kitties. Far-too-young kittens found as hungry orphans or ones not properly weaned require constant care to survive and thrive.

For tips, *Catster* reached out to the dedicated Bottle Baby ICU team at the Arizona Humane Society in Phoenix.

“These bottle-babies require round-the-clock care,” says Jared Wright, the intensive care and special projects manager at AHS. “We are caring for newborn, orphaned kittens who are anywhere from just a few hours old to 4 weeks of age. They are our most vulnerable and tiniest patients.”

Sadly, there are far too many of them. During the most recent kitten season, for example, AHS staff and trained volunteers cared for 2,188 newborn and underage kittens with a survival rate of 88%. And these are statistics from just one shelter.

Jared shares two vital feeding tips for baby kittens:

FEED FORMULA. “Cow’s milk, unfortunately, does not support the nutrients that they need and can cause gastrointestinal problems,” Jared says. “We feed our tiny felines a quality kitten formula, such as PetAg’s KMR (kitten milk replacer) or Breeder’s Edge Foster Care Feline Milk Replacer.”

FEED IN THE RIGHT POSITION. “At this young age, kittens don’t have a gag reflex, and if fed on their backs and too much formula goes into their mouths, there is a risk of it getting into their lungs and causing them to aspirate,” Jared says. “Keep their feet and bellies on the table, guiding the bottle with a proper-sized nipple at a 45-degree angle into their mouths.”



protein, 30 to 40% fat and less than 10% carbohydrates.

Read the label — recognizable protein should be the first ingredient, such as chicken or salmon. Make sure the brand provides a customer service toll-free number you can call if you have questions, Dr. Primm adds.

Felines of all ages benefit from probiotics and prebiotics for digestive health as well as omega-3 supplements that bolster the brain and fight

inflammation. “Good sources of omega-3s include sardine oil, anchovy oils and krill oils,” Dr. Hofve says.

Weigh in

Get into the habit of measuring food portions and weighing your growing kitten to prevent excessive weight gain, or worse, obesity.

“Once a kitten is about 6 months of age and has been spayed or neutered, he has already attained nearly 75% of

growth,” Dr. Hofve says. “Use a digital scale and pay attention to weight gains, so your kitten is not gaining too much too quickly.”

Feed this way

Kittens also fare best when given their daily portions in three or four mini meals throughout the day rather than one large meal. “I like for kittens to eat small frequent meals and to have them introduced to food puzzles and enrichment feeders,” says Dr. Primm, who hosts the *Nine Lives with Dr. Kat* podcast on Pet Life Radio.

Felines are not social gatherers like we are at mealtime, so reduce stress by feeding all pets in separate locations and definitely in separate bowls, Dr. Hofve adds. This allows you to know how much of your measured food your kitten ate and to be able to report any issues (like meal-skipping or not eating all of the food) to your veterinarian.

Supervise mealtime to prevent food bullies from trying to steal another pet’s food or from triggering a food fight, Dr. Primm adds.

Work with your veterinarian on selecting diets that best meet your kitten’s age, health status and activity level. You can also reach out to board-certified veterinary nutritionists at such websites as balanceit.com and petdiets.com, especially if you are considering making homemade diets.

“I recommend always consulting with a veterinary nutritionist before trying to formulate a home diet for a kitten,” Dr. Primm says. “Missing components in a kitten’s diet can impact that kitten forever.”

Welcome to the Wonder Year! By investing in what you feed and how much you feed your kitten, you can make a major impact on your feline’s health for his lifetime. 🐾

Off to a good – and healthy – start

Here are just a few examples of diets that meet growing kittens’ nutritional needs.



\$28.39.
PetAg Complete Nursing Kit + KMR Kitten Milk Replacer Powder; chewy.com



\$20.98 (5-pound bag).
Blue Buffalo Baby Blue Healthy Growth Formula Dry Food; chewy.com



\$43.68
(case of 24, 3-ounce cans).
Wellness Complete Health Kitten Pate; chewy.com

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Arden Moore is a pet-behavior consultant, author and master pet first-aid instructor who teaches hands-on classes with her cat, Casey, and dog, Kona. She hosts the national radio show Four Legged Life and the Oh Behave Show podcast. Learn more at ardenmoore.com.

