FURLYWISE GUIDE

Kitten Care 101

Everything you need for the first months

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Welcome, kitten parent

International Cat Care calls the first four months of a kitten's life "the most fun and the most important". This guide helps you make the most of them.

You'll find what to buy, how to set up a safe first room, feeding by age, litter training, play, vaccinations and neutering, and the signs that mean it's time to call your vet. The checklists at the back are made to print.

> **How to use this guide.** Read "Getting ready" before your kitten arrives, then "The first days". Keep the health chapter handy for your first vet visit.

General information, checked against sources from the ASPCA, the Cornell Feline Health Center and International Cat Care. It isn't a substitute for your own vet, who knows your kitten.

Getting ready

Your shopping list

The ASPCA's cat supply checklist covers the essentials:

- ✓ **Kitten food**: a complete, balanced food made for kittens (more on this in "Feeding your kitten")
- ✓ **Food dish and water bowl**, kept well away from the litter tray
- ✓ **Litter tray and litter**: a tray with low sides is easier for kittens to climb into

- ✓ **Scratching post**: sturdy, at least three feet high and covered in rough material such as sisal
- ✓ **Cat carrier** for the journey home and vet visits
- ✓ **Cat bed** with a soft, warm blanket; a bed with high sides and a low front keeps out draughts
- ✓ **Interactive toys**, such as a wand toy
- ✓ **Brush and comb**
- ✓ **Safety collar with an ID tag**

Set up a safe first room

International Cat Care advises that kittens, in particular, should be confined to **one quiet room** for the first few weeks. Put everything your kitten needs in that room: food, water, bed, litter tray, toys and a scratching post.

- ✓ Keep windows securely closed
- ✓ Remove breakable objects from shelves and windowsills
- ✓ Check for exposed cables, fireplaces and poisonous plants
- ✓ Secure cupboard doors, and make sure no medicines or cleaning products are within reach
- ✓ Avoid a room with full-length curtains your kitten could climb
- ✓ Remember kittens can squeeze into very small spaces

Kitten-proof the rest of your home

Lilies can kill cats. International Cat Care warns that all parts of the lily plant are toxic: eating less than one leaf, part of a flower, the pollen, or even drinking water from a vase of cut lilies can be fatal. "Pollen-free" lilies are still unsafe. Keep lilies out of any home with a cat.

- ✓ Don't leave toys with string attached lying around; use them only under supervision
- ✓ Avoid toys made of ribbon, string, wool or pipe cleaners, which can damage a kitten's intestines if swallowed
- ✓ Keep human medicines off tables and counters: Cornell notes cats will gobble up pills they find
- ✓ Store household chemicals where your cat can't reach them
- ✓ Keep other toxic plants away too, including poinsettias, mistletoe, holly, tulips, philodendrons, amaryllis and hydrangeas
- ✓ Keep toxic foods out of reach: grapes, raisins, onions, garlic, avocado, xylitol and chocolate

The first days

Go slowly. A calm start helps your kitten settle and trust you.

1. **Bring them to their room in the carrier.** Put the carrier down, open the door gently and let your kitten come out when they're ready. Never force them out.
2. **Let them explore.** Once your kitten has found their food, water and litter tray, leave the room for a while.

3. **Keep the first 24 hours quiet.** Don't overwhelm them with visitors or handling.
4. **Don't coax a hiding kitten out.** Let them come to you in their own time.
5. **Bring familiar bedding** from their previous home if you can; the smell is comforting.
6. **Keep feeding the same food** at first. If you change it, do it gradually over 7–14 days.
7. **Let them sleep.** Kittens need plenty of rest, so let them sleep undisturbed whenever they need to.

Book a vet check

Cornell advises that any new cat should be checked by a vet as soon as possible. Bring any health records from the breeder or shelter.

Indoors first

International Cat Care says kittens shouldn't go outside until at least a week after they've finished their primary vaccinations, and outdoor time should be supervised until about 6 months old. The ASPCA recommends keeping cats indoors, noting that outdoor cats don't live as long as indoor cats.

Feeding your kitten

What to feed

Kittens need about **two to three times the energy of an adult cat**, with around 30% of their energy from protein (ASPCA). Choose a food made specifically for kittens: Cornell recommends looking for an **AAFCO statement** on the label, which means the food is complete and balanced

for the life stage it names. Kittens stay on kitten food until they're mature, at about **one year old**.

How often to feed

Kittens need more food per pound of body weight than adult cats, so they eat more often. Sources differ a little: International Cat Care suggests 4–5 small meals a day for a new kitten, while Cornell says kittens usually do best on three meals a day until six months, then two. Ask your vet what suits your kitten.

Age	Meals a day
Newly home (about 8–12 weeks)	3–5 small meals
Up to 6 months	3 meals
6–12 months	2 meals
Adult (about 1 year+)	1–2 meals

Typical meals per day. Sources: Cornell Feline Health Center, International Cat Care.

Water and milk

Fresh, clean water should be available at all times; wash and refill the bowl daily. **Don't give cow's milk**: the ASPCA notes it causes stomach upset and diarrhoea in some kittens, because cats don't have much of the enzyme that digests lactose.

Treats

Keep treats small. The ASPCA suggests treats make up no more than 5% of a kitten's daily intake, with the rest from a quality kitten food. Too many treats can cause vomiting or diarrhoea. Cornell doesn't recommend raw

diets, and supplements usually aren't needed with a complete, balanced food.

Litter training

Kittens usually learn to use a litter tray by copying their mother, so most arrive already knowing what to do. Help them by placing your kitten in the tray when they wake up and after meals.

- ✓ **How many trays:** Cornell's rule is one per cat, plus one. In a home with several floors, the ASPCA suggests one tray per floor
- ✓ **Where:** a quiet, easy-to-reach spot, well away from food and water
- ✓ **Which tray:** most cats prefer simple trays without hoods; kittens need low sides to climb in easily
- ✓ **Which litter:** most cats prefer unscented, fine-textured litter
- ✓ **Scoop** solid waste at least once a day
- ✓ **Wash the tray weekly** with mild detergent; avoid ammonia, deodorants and strong scents, especially lemon

Play, scratching and handling

Play the right way

- ✓ **Never use your hands or feet as toys.** International Cat Care warns kittens learn to associate fingers and toes with play, which causes problems as they grow
- ✓ **Use wand or "fishing rod" toys**, which keep some distance between you and your kitten

- ✓ **Keep sessions short.** Kittens tire quickly; a minute of frenzied play is a good result
- ✓ **Cardboard boxes** and cat activity centres make great free fun
- ✓ **Puzzle feeders** can be introduced from about 12 weeks

Scratching

Scratching is normal, so give your kitten somewhere good to do it. The ASPCA recommends a sturdy post at least three feet tall that won't wobble, covered with rough material like sisal, burlap or bark. Some cats prefer to scratch horizontally: Cornell suggests a flattened cardboard box or a log on its side. Trim nails every two to three weeks.

Handling and grooming

To pick up a kitten, place one hand behind the front legs and the other under the hindquarters, and lift gently. **Never lift a cat by the scruff or by the front legs.** Get your kitten used to gentle brushing while they're young; it's much easier than starting later.

Socialisation

The key socialisation period for kittens is between two and seven weeks old, usually before they come home, which is why a well-socialised kitten from a good breeder or shelter matters. Once home, keep building confidence with calm, gentle handling, meeting different people, and everyday sounds and objects like the vacuum cleaner, TV and cat carrier, introduced gradually.

Health: vaccines, neutering and checks

Vaccinations

According to Cornell, kittens receive a series of vaccines over a 12–16 week period, starting at 6–8 weeks old. International Cat Care describes the first course as often starting at 8–9 weeks, with a second injection 3–4 weeks later, a third dose commonly recommended at 16–20 weeks, and a first booster 12 months later. Your vet will set the exact schedule.

Core vaccines recommended for all kittens, including indoor-only cats, protect against:

- **Feline panleukopenia** (feline distemper)
- **Feline herpesvirus** (viral rhinotracheitis) and **calicivirus**
- **Rabies**, where required
- **Feline leukaemia virus (FeLV)**: Cornell notes this is now considered a core vaccine for kittens, because they're at higher risk of progressive infection

Cornell also recommends that all cats are **tested for FeLV** before joining a home.

Neutering

Kittens can reach sexual maturity from around four months old. International Cat Care recommends neutering routinely at **around four months**, and the ASPCA says by **five months**. Neutering females before six months also reduces the risk of certain cancers. For very large breeds such as Maine Coons, discuss timing with your vet.

Questions for your vet: Which vaccines does my kitten need, and when? Has my kitten been tested for FeLV? When should we neuter? Which parasite treatments do they need? How much should I feed? When can they go outside?

When to call your vet

Kittens are small and can become ill quickly. If you're worried, call your vet.

Poisoning? Call your vet straight away, or ASPCA Animal Poison Control on (888) 426-4435 in the US (a fee may apply). Cornell's advice: do not make your kitten vomit unless a vet tells you to.

Get help straight away if your kitten

- ✕ Ate or chewed any part of a lily, or drank water from a vase of lilies
- ✕ Ate medicine, a toxic plant or a toxic food
- ✕ Swallowed string, ribbon, thread or wool
- ✕ Has vomiting or diarrhoea that doesn't settle, or won't eat
- ✕ Seems lethargic, weak or unusually quiet
- ✕ Has trouble breathing

A healthy kitten, as Cornell puts it, is active, bright, responsive and eager to play. If yours isn't, trust your instincts and call.

Printable checklists

Before your kitten comes home

- [ ] Kitten food (same as current), food and water bowls
- [ ] Litter tray with low sides and unscented litter
- [ ] Scratching post (3 feet+, sturdy, sisal)
- [ ] Carrier, bed and soft blanket
- [ ] Wand toy and a few safe toys
- [ ] Brush, comb and nail clippers
- [ ] Safety collar with ID tag
- [ ] Safe room set up and checked
- [ ] No lilies anywhere in the home
- [ ] Medicines and cleaning products locked away
- [ ] Vet found and first check booked

The first months

- [ ] Week 1: kitten settled in one room; using the litter tray
- [ ] First vet visit done; FeLV test; vaccine dates in the calendar
- [ ] Short daily play sessions with a wand toy (never hands)
- [ ] Brushing and nail trims practised gently
- [ ] Gradually given access to more of the home
- [ ] Neutering booked for around 4–5 months
- [ ] Outdoors only after vaccinations, and supervised

Vaccination record

Date	Vaccine	Next due	Notes

Sources

Every fact in this guide was checked against these vet-reviewed sources:

- ASPCA: General Cat Care
  https://www.aspca.org/pet-care/cat-care/general-cat-care
- ASPCA: Cat Nutrition Tips
  https://www.aspca.org/pet-care/cat-care/cat-nutrition-tips
- Cornell Feline Health Center: Choosing and Caring for Your New Cat
  https://www.vet.cornell.edu/node/3986
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  https://www.vet.cornell.edu/node/4070
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  https://www.vet.cornell.edu/node/4069
- Cornell Feline Health Center: Common Cat Hazards
  https://www.vet.cornell.edu/node/4043
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- International Cat Care: Helping your new cat or kitten settle in
  https://icatcare.org/articles/helping-your-new-cat-or-kitten-settle-in
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- International Cat Care: Poisonous Plants https://icatcare.org/articles/poisonous-plants

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