international cat care

Life stage guide to caring for your new kitten

Kitten 0-6m

Make life's first steps the right ones by using advice from veterinary surgeons and behaviourists

international cat care

International Cat Care is a charity founded in 1958 by a small group of very passionate cat lovers, who were compelled to do something about the dismal lack of information about cat health and wellbeing. Over 60 years later, we are still working hard to improve the health and wellbeing of all cats everywhere, owned and unowned, working towards a cat friendly world where each cat is treated with understanding compassion and respect.

icatcare.org

Introduction

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Congratulations — you are the owner of a cute little bundle of energy and curiosity, which will quickly grow into a wonderful cat that could be with you for the next 15 years (or more). What you do now could lay the foundations for your cat's health and mental wellbeing, an excellent and rewarding relationship, and years of enjoyment with your cat.

This booklet aims to give you information for your kitten's first six months of life. This is a very important time — the equivalent of a child's first 10 years.

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Collecting your kitten

Kitten 0-6m

You will need to bring your kitten home in a carrier, no matter how short the journey, as this will keep it safe and secure. Choosing the right type of carrier and helping your kitten to associate the carrier with positive experiences will make life much easier for you and your cat. It will help ensure future journeys, such as to the veterinary clinic or boarding cattery, are stress-free.

- A safe and comfortable carrier should be used for all forms of travel (in many countries it is not legal to have a cat loose in the car).
- Solid, strong plastic carriers are recommended as they are robust, protect the cat if the carrier is knocked or dropped, and are escape-proof. Cardboard or temporary plastic carriers may not even last for one journey if they get wet or if a very determined cat tries to scratch its way out. Carriers made from woven products such as willow and rattan are extremely difficult to clean if your cat toilets during the journey, and fabric carriers that open and close with zips can easily be opened by a determined cat.
- Carriers that allow the kitten to walk straight in are ideal for training your cat to voluntarily enter and exit the carrier. Placing a treat in the carrier can encourage cats to explore inside. Repeating and rewarding the kitten each time will help the kitten to associate the carrier with good things. For those kittens that are a little more tentative, a carrier that also opens at the top is ideal to gently place and remove the kitten via the top opening.

How to carry and support a cat carrier.

- All carriers should come apart easily, so that you can take the top completely off. This allows a veterinary surgeon gentle access to examine your cat in the base of its carrier — this is a cat friendly approach to veterinary visits.
- While it may be tempting to buy a small carrier when your kitten is little, remember he or she will grow rapidly. Investing in a carrier that is big enough for your cat to stand up in and turn around as an adult is important.

If you buy an adult sized carrier from the start, your kitten can be made to feel more secure by reducing the internal space during transport using a rolled-up towel or bedding.

When you travel

- Put something warm, soft and familiar in the carrier for the kitten to cuddle up in, for example a blanket it has been sleeping on.
- Spray some Feliway Classic (cat synthetic pheromone) into the carrier before you travel to help the kitten to feel more secure (spray 20 minutes or more before travel to allow the alcohol in the spray to evaporate). See feliway.com for more information.
- Place the basket on something waterproof in the car in case toileting occurs during travel.
- Drape a familiar-smelling towel or blanket over the carrier in order to help the kitten feel more secure. This is particularly important for the more open plastic-coated wire carriers. Ensure the carrier is adequately ventilated on long journeys. This towel or blanket can also be pre-sprayed with Feliway Classic at least 20 minutes before being placed over the carrier.
- When travelling, secure the carrier so that its base is as level as possible and does not move around. For car travel, a seat belt can be placed through the top handle of the carrier and/or around the carrier.
- Speak to your kitten in a gentle voice.
- If possible, depending on your mode of travel, provide small and tasty food rewards in the carrier so your kitten associates being in and travelling in the carrier with a positive experience. You can also put some toys in the carrier which will act as additional rewards.
- When carrying your kitten in its carrier, do not hold it by the handle alone, as the carrier may tilt and swing giving the kitten a feeling of unsteadiness. Instead, support the carrier from underneath, holding it securely against your body, keep it level and minimise movement.

Using soft bedding and feline pheromones in a cat carrier can help make the kitten feel more secure.

If you have more than one cat, they should always be transported in separate carriers, and never forced into one carrier together.

Somewhere to feel safe

Kitten 0-6m

Kittens may feel a little vulnerable when you first bring them to your home, as this will be a totally new environment, with many unfamiliar sights, sounds and smells. They will also have been separated from everything that was familiar to them up until this point. Providing safe, quiet areas for the kitten to hide in when it needs to will help your kitten settle into its new home.

- Choose a quiet room where the kitten can be kept for the first week or two to adjust gradually to its new surroundings. This will give your kitten a safe place from which to explore the rest of its home when it is ready. It also helps to maintain successful toileting in the litter tray and avoids the risk of toileting elsewhere in the house.
- Choose a room without pot-plants or other hazards (see page 18).
- Plug in a Feliway diffuser 48 hours before the kitten comes home. Use Feliway Friends if you have no other cats or Feliway Optimum if you already have a cat(s) (see feliway.com).

An example of a safe place for the kitten to sleep in overnight.

- If you have other pets keep them out of the room until the kitten has settled in and you are ready to make controlled careful introductions (see pages 11 and 14).
- Over time, and under supervision, your kitten can be gradually introduced to the wider home, ensuring it is physically safe, calm and happy at all times.

Somewhere to sleep

It is important from day one to set the routines that you intend to establish for the future. Many owners feel that kittens need to be close to them at night, particularly when they first arrive, but this can set an undesirable precedent for nocturnal games and excitement, and result in no sleep whatsoever for you! Cats are naturally active at dawn and dusk, but your kitten can learn to adjust its sleeping patterns to fit in with your lifestyle. There is nothing cruel in putting a kitten to bed in a cosy, warm and secure environment in another room until you wake in the morning.

- Provide a bed with high sides to give an added feeling of security. This will also help to keep out draughts. Be sure there is a low front for easy access, and soft and warm bedding inside (such as fleece). A small cardboard box, cut down at the front, or an igloo-type bed which the kitten can conceal itself in is ideal.
- If your kitten has something comforting from its previous home, such as bedding or a soft toy, then put this in the bed, so that the scent is familiar to it.
- Position the bed where the kitten has easy access to it. As the kitten grows and uses the whole house, you can provide more beds in favourite places.

Somewhere to toilet

Kittens learn where to toilet very quickly. They will often have learned this from their mother, and you simply need to provide the litter tray and litter in an easily accessible place and they will automatically use it. If your kitten seems unsure of where the tray is, is having toileting accidents or it toileting in an inappropriate location, place it in the tray from time to time (usually after feeding or waking up). For multi-cat households, make sure the kitten always has a litter tray of its own. The general rule is to provide the same number of litter trays as there are cats per household, plus an additional one.

Clean it regularly

- Cats do not like using soiled litter trays, which may cause them to avoid their tray. Unclean trays can be a source of infection, so the litter tray must be kept clean and emptied regularly. Scoop out solids (and urine if a clumping litter is used) at least once daily, and clean thoroughly at least weekly or more frequently, if necessary. Use hot water

Choice of litter tray and litter

- Cats need an adequately sized tray so they can move around. Ideally, it will be one and half times the length of the cat from nose to base of tail. Many adult-sized trays have high sides and, therefore, initially your kitten may need a lower sided tray to make getting in and out of it easier.
- Initially, you may want to use the same type of litter as the kitten was using previously, as it will recognise what it is for.
- Make sure the litter is deep enough to dig in — about 3 cm deep is ideal.
- Avoid scented litters as they can be off-putting for the kitten, as can litter types which are hard or sharp underfoot.
- Avoid disposable litter tray liners, as well as 'self-cleaning' or automated litter trays, which may upset your kitten.
- As the kitten grows it may need a larger litter tray and you may want to change the litter.

An example of a low sided litter tray suitable for kittens.

For more in-depth information about litters and trays go to: icatcare.org/advice/litter-trays

with washing up liquid or a suitable cat-safe cleaning agent (correctly diluted and rinsed out properly) to clean the tray.

Some products, including, but not limited to, phenolic disinfectants that go cloudy in water, are toxic to cats. For more information on safe disinfectants for cats go to: icatcare.org/keeping-cats-safe-disinfectants

- Each cat may have its own preferences, and some prefer different depths or to use separate trays for urinating and defecating. Therefore, it is advisable to offer two trays, in separate locations within the kitten's area. Litter trays with a shallow depth of litter may need to be cleaned more regularly.

Site it carefully

- The position of the litter tray is important. Provide more than one tray to give the kitten choice. They should be located separately where the kitten can easily find them. If your home is on more than one floor, it is a good idea to have a tray on each floor so prevent toileting in places other than the tray.
- Position trays away from food and water and busy thoroughfares, noisy appliances (such as washing machines), or where other cats, dogs or small children are present or could interfere with them.

As your cat grows there are other things to consider regarding placing of litter tray. Find what to do and what to avoid at: icatcare.org/advice/litter-trays

Something to eat

When you bring your kitten home it is likely to be around eight to 12 weeks old (slightly older if it is a pedigree kitten) and should be fully weaned.

If, for some reason, your kitten is younger than eight weeks old and requires bottle feeding, there is information to help you at: icatcare.org/hand-rearing-kittens

- Kittens have small stomachs and have to be fed little and often, like babies.
- Kittens aged eight to 12 weeks need at least four meals a day, kittens aged three to six months need at least three meals, and junior cats over six months need at least two small meals. In the wild, adult cats eat small (mouse sized!) multiple meals over the day.
- Check the instructions on the food packaging for the correct amount to feed. You can feed a meal at a time, or provide some dry food on an ad lib (free access) basis — it depends very much on your lifestyle, what your kitten likes and is used to, and if you have other cats in the house with certain feeding routines and habits. It may be a good idea to introduce your kitten to both wet and dry food at a young age, so that it is familiar with and happy to eat both, which can be helpful later in life.
- Cats are obligate carnivores, meaning they cannot thrive or survive without meat in their diet. They are simply not designed to be vegetarians, and to feed

Provide small kitten-sized food portions.

a diet without meat would result in deficiencies and illness.

- Feed a good quality commercial kitten food (it is very hard to get a home-made diet right for rapidly growing kittens).

- If the food is marked 'complete' it contains everything the kitten needs to stay healthy. If it is marked 'complementary' or 'supplementary', it does not supply all the kitten needs and should be fed with other foods.

Hazards of raw feeding

If the kitten has been fed a raw diet, this should be discontinued, and the kitten should be started on a good quality complete commercial kitten food. Raw diets are not nutritionally complete for growing kittens.

Raw diets can also pose a risk to both cat and human health. Raw meat can be a source of diseases that can make both cats and people ill.

- When you first take your kitten home, try to feed it on the same food it has been used to, as long as it is on a suitable complete kitten diet. A sudden change of diet, combined with the stress of adapting to a new home, can cause stomach upsets and diarrhoea.

If you need to change your kitten to a new diet, do so gradually, over a period of three to seven days. Start by initially mixing in a small amount of the new food, then gradually reducing the old food. For more information go to: icatcare.org/advice/feeding-your-cat-or-kitten

- Fresh clean drinking water should be available at all times. Water should be placed away from food bowls (avoid 'double bowls' that have food in one side and water in the other), with at least one other alternative water source in another location. Once the kitten has explored the whole house, this could be on another floor of the home.

Provide a water source away from food.

Something to play with

Kitten 0-6m

Playing with your kitten is very important and kittens love to play.

- Toys need not be expensive. Rolled up balls of paper, empty cotton reels, ping-pong balls and cardboard boxes are all ideal and cost little.
- Be sure the toys you buy are safe and have no small parts a kitten can swallow or become trapped in.
- Kicking toys such as a stuffed toy or a large stuffed sock are fun for cats that like to rake toys with their back legs while grabbing them with their front claws, sometimes also biting them.

It is good to offer kittens a variety of toys to play with. This is a good kicking toy.

- Gentle noise (for example, a tinkling bell, or a crackly centre, firmly concealed in a toy) may be attractive and fun. Take care not to alarm cats with louder noises.
- Laser pointers look fun, but kittens may become frustrated at not being able to catch something physical, and they may cause damage to their eyes.

Toys that make a soft noise can be attractive and fun to play with.

- Some toys (known as puzzle feeders) are designed to be filled with cat food and can provide amusement and exercise for inquisitive kittens' bodies and minds. Any food consumed in this way should be considered part of the kitten's daily food allowance to avoid excessive weight gain. Feeding your kitten's daily food ration, little and often, via puzzle feeders will be fun for them, build confidence and teach independence, as well as fulfil the natural problem-solving behaviours and exercise needs involved in frequent hunting and catching of prey (and it is entertaining for us to watch too!).

Simple, home-made puzzle feeders can provide lots of entertainment.

Wand toys on the end of a stick or a stick and piece of string are a great way to play interactively with your kitten and keep it away from hands and feet.

- Wand toys on the end of a stick or a stick that has a feather or small item on the end, or at the end of a string or wire, are a good choice, are easy to keep moving and tend to maintain a kitten's attention. Such toys are interactive, requiring you to move the wand about and they are a fun way to engage with your kitten. Due to their length, wand toys mean that kittens play safely at a distance from you, and they are, therefore, a great way of preventing kittens from swiping or biting at hands.

Ensure that your kitten is not left alone with wand toys that have lengths of string or elastic attached, as these may get caught around the kitten's neck or leg. These are for supervised human-kitten play only! For more information on play go to:
icatcare.org/advice/playing-with-your-cat
icatcare.org/at-home-with-your-cat-games-to-play
icatcare.org/advice/puzzle-feeders

Hands are not toys

Do not let your kitten scratch, claw or bite hands or feet, even if your kitten only does so in play. This may be perceived as fine or amusing when the kitten is little, but as its 'weapons' (claws and teeth) become larger and the cat stronger, it can cause damage and certainly pain. It is a habit that is best avoided.

To prevent bad play habits, it is important to be prepared and ready to focus the cat onto toys before it attempts to engage with hands or feet. This is where it is useful to play with toys at the end of rods, kicking toys. or those which can be flicked or rolled away from you, or involve your kitten playing in a self-directed way (such as puzzle feeders or food treasure hunts), particularly when it is in 'high energy mode'.

Handling your kitten

Kitten 0-6m

Kittens are small and could be hurt by rough handling or if they are dropped. Always support the whole kitten with two hands as you pick it up (never pick it up by the scruff of the neck). Place one hand under the kitten's bottom and the other under the front legs. By holding the kitten close to your body, you can make sure it feels secure, and does not jump from your arms. It is best to sit children on the floor to learn to handle the kitten. Everyone wants to cuddle a kitten when it first arrives, but this can be a bit overwhelming, and the kitten will need time to rest and adjust to its new environment.

Give young children limited supervised contact initially to avoid the kitten being over-handled. For more advice go to: icatcare.org/advice/introducing-cats-and-children

Initial handling should comprise gentle stroking on the head and face area and can be extended to gentle stroking down the back.

Always support the whole kitten with two hands as you pick it up.

- During the first couple of days any handling should, ideally, take place when the kitten initiates it. Initial handling should comprise gentle stroking on the head and face area and can be extended to gentle stroking down the back. If the kitten is comfortable with this, you can gently pick up your kitten to get it used to being held.
- Handle the kitten frequently throughout the day for short periods of time, rather than providing continuous physical contact.
- Always pause after stroking to assess the kitten's reaction. If it appears in any way overwhelmed or uncomfortable, give the kitten a rest from any more stroking or handling.

- Consider using the 'five second rule', whereby you touch or handle your kitten for five seconds (or less), then pause to assess whether the kitten is actively enjoying it, and calmly soliciting more — in which case, try another five seconds. If the kitten seems avoidant, or is in a high energy mood, stop! Give it time and space to move away and calm down, or play with a wand-type toy instead.
- Even when enjoying the stroking, ensure regular breaks for the kitten.
- Teach children that the kitten is not a toy and how to recogise whether the kitten is enjoying their attention or not.
- Every cat is an individual, and some kittens will enjoy handling more than others, so go at your kitten's pace rather than forcing interaction.

Building confidence

Once the kitten is settled, it should ideally be handled by lots of different types of people (young, old, big, small, male, female) but not all at once, for short periods of time over several weeks. This will help the kitten to continue learning to be comfortable around humans in general, and that people are friendly and not something to fear. However, if your kitten does not appear to be actively and calmly enjoying this, stop. If your kitten does not perceive this to be a positive interaction, too much exposure may lead to anxiety. In this case, check with your vet to ensure good health. The veterinary surgeon may arrange a referral to an appropriately qualified positive reinforcement behaviour professional or trainer.

Meeting a resident cat

First impressions matter! Successful introductions of a new cat or kitten to a household must be carefully undertaken. Do not to rush introductions. Plan ahead and prepare — this can make a big difference and promote good long-term relationships between cats. Without care, introductions have the potential to be difficult for all concerned. Preparing and moving through a slow and step-wise plan will ensure the best chance of success and promote good long-term relationships between cats. While the kitten is adjusting to its new home, it should be kept separate from the other resident pets until it has settled in and everything is calm and quiet.

Your existing cat (or cats) will have established territories within your home, and the introduction of another cat, albeit a little kitten, is not necessarily going to be well received. It is important to ensure that the resident cat(s) can carry on their lives in their existing space without awareness of the kitten (initially) and never given the impression that they are 'under siege'. Ensuring the normal routine of your existing cats is not disrupted is going to be very important. Their beds, food and litter trays should not moved about, and their feeding times remain the same as much as possible, and they do not have to see, hear or encounter the kitten.

Forty-eight hours before your kitten comes home, plug in a Feliway Optimum pheromone diffuser in the areas of your home that your resident cat chooses to use.

Using a small soft cloth or soft cotton glove, gently stroke or rub around the kitten's head. Rub this kitten scent onto the furniture at cat height to help the other cat adjust to the kitten's scent before they meet.

Scent is very important to cats. For your cats, your house will have a certain smell which makes it familiar. It will consist of the resident cat(s) scent, left by rubbing its face and body on walls and furniture, along with the normal household smells. Although you are unlikely to see the scent markings; your cat's scent is everywhere.

Initially, introducing the kitten by smell only may help resident cat(s) investigate the kitten without encountering it, and is a gentle start to the introductions. To mix the new kitten's scent into this communal smell, swap bedding between the kitten and resident cat(s) — this should only be carried out once the kitten is fully adjusted to his/her new home. In addition, if the kitten enjoys being stroked, use a small soft cloth, a soft cotton glove or your hand, and gently stroke or rub around the kitten's head and the rest of its body, and then rub this onto the furniture at cat height. This leaves 'kitten scent' around for the resident cat(s) to encounter as it moves around.

The first meeting

- The door to the kitten's room should remain closed initially, allowing the kitten to exercise within that space without encountering your other cat.
- Exchange scents (as above) for about a week, if possible, before letting them see each other. Then, let each explore the others' space, when they are not present.
- The first few meetings should not involve approach of, or contact with, each other. If you have a glass or mesh door or can set up a barrier with baby gates and mesh so that the cats can see each other, but not yet interact, this will help introductions too. Initially, this should be partially covered, with something like a blanket.
- When you first have the kitten and resident cat in the same room keep everything quiet and relaxed. Reward calm behaviour.
- Have one person supervising each cat, in a low-key way, and ready to gently and positively intervene before a problem occurs.

If you can, set up a barrier so that the cats can see each other, but not yet interact.

Have a wand toy ready to distract if required during initial meetings.

- As long as each cat is calm and happy, initially allow then to sniff and interact and get used to one another for very brief periods, before distracting them away with a toy or food or attention that they enjoy. Kittens are very curious about other cats and will try to interact; it is the older cat which may be more likely to be wary or even upset. Never force interactions, and reward calm reactions. Allow the resident cat to move away if it wishes to. Watch for the slightest sign of tension, and gently remove the kitten before any upset.
- The cats may choose to stay away from or ignore each other – this is fine. There is no rush, and introductions should be a 'non-event. It may take some time to accept a new cat in the house. As long as there is no sign of upset or distress, or antagonism, they may learn to accept each other over time.
- Kittens like to hide under furniture or in small places. Make sure there are things in the room which the kitten can get into or under safely, which the larger cat cannot access. Resident cat(s) should also have room to avoid or be inaccessible to the kitten.
- In some introductions the kitten may be accepted fairly quickly, in others it may take weeks or months before the resident cat feels relaxed with the kitten around — all cats are different. All interactions between adult and kitten should still be closely supervised.
- The kitten and existing cat(s) should never be forced to interact/be in close proximity to one another, nor should they be fed in the same locations (cats are naturally solitary feeders), as this may lead to conflict between them and potentially negatively affect their relationship. Both kitten and adult, should always be provided with ample resources of their own (bed, litter tray, food bowls, water bowls, etc) positioned in separate locations.
- The energy and enthusiasm kittens have for play can often outweigh that of adult cats. In order to prevent your kitten annoying your resident cat(s), ensure your kitten has ample opportunity for social and independent play. Watch carefully for any play behaviour from your kitten that appears to be unwanted by your resident cats. If this happens, calmly re-direct the kitten onto more appropriate outlets, such as toys, before the resident cat gets upset.

Do not leave kittens unsupervised with resident cats until you are happy that they are getting along.

For further information go to: icatcare.org/advice/introducing-an-adult-cat-to-your-cat

Meeting a resident dog

Kitten 0-6m

Cats and dogs can and often do get on well. They generally have different agendas and priorities, and so do not compete for the same resources. It may be natural for either to show a little wariness initially. Careful planning following a slow and positive stepwise plan can result in calm acceptance of each other, or even friendships!

If the dog has happily lived with cats before it may make the introduction process easier. Similarly, a kitten that has been reared around dogs, and found their company to be a positive experience, is much more likely to be curious than fearful of a dog in its new home. However, if you have a dog that has experience of herding or chasing, such as a working sheep dog, some terrier breeds, or an ex-racing greyhound, then it may be much more driven than other breeds by its instincts and previous experiences to herd or chase. In all cases, care should be taken during introductions.

- Forty-eight hours before bringing your kitten home, plug an Adaptil pheromone diffuser (adaptil.com) in the space where your dog normally lives.
- The plan should follow the same structure and steps as cat introductions (pages 11–13). It is important to progress slowly, positively, and ensure that both the dog and the kitten are calm and relaxed at all times.
- As with cat-to-cat introductions, before any physical introductions, introduce each animal to the other's scent. This can be carried out by swapping bedding and by stroking both animals with a cotton glove on and leaving the scent around for the other to encounter or allowing the other to smell the glove, prior to meeting each other. Reaction to the scent will give you an indication of how each animal might react to the other, as well as giving them a chance to become accustomed to the smell of the other before actually physically meeting.
- Make sure the kitten has lots of places to escape to. Adult cats can jump up onto furniture or windowsills, but kittens will need steps up to safe places using cushions or stools. Smaller kittens are likely to hide under furniture or in small places, so make sure there are things in the room which the kitten can get into or

Have the dog on a loose lead for the first few meetings to prevent any chasing or lungeing at the kitten.

under safely, and which the dog cannot access. Ensure the cat has plenty of places off the ground to retreat to or watch from. Cats feel safer if they are off the ground.

- Similarly, the dog should be able to avoid or move away from the kitten if it chooses to. The resident dog should never be trapped or have to accept unwanted or sustained attention from the kitten.
- Ensure that both dog and kitten have some physical and mental exercise before meeting. This ensures that they are both in a calm and relaxed state, and not so excitable when they meet. Have the dog with a well-fitting collar or body harness, and loose lead to prevent any chasing or lunges at the kitten.
- Reward both dog and kitten for quiet, calm, relaxed behaviour in the presence of each other — initially at a distance, always supervised, and perhaps with an engaging activity for each to do, such as calm play or attention.
- If either the kitten or the dog is excitable, gently and positively remove them from the situation before there is a problem, and allow each to calm down.
- Using rewards, dogs (and cats) can be taught to look at or move towards you on cue, so that you can direct them away from the kitten if need be.
- Ensure that the kitten can access litter facilities, food, water and resting places without having to pass the dog directly, and vice versa. Each animal should have access to everything it wants and needs, without having to encounter the other, until such time as they are relaxed in each other's company.
- Child safety gates can be used to separate dogs and cats and allow the kitten access to its food, for example. The kitten's food bowl should be kept separate from the dog's. When the cat is older, food can be placed on raised surfaces to keep out of the dog's reach.

Child safety gates can be used to separate dogs and cats and allow the kitten access to its resources without having to pass the dog.

Never leave the dog and kitten alone together until you are happy that they are safe together.

For more information go to: icatcare.org/advice/introducing-a-cat-or-kitten-to-your-dog

Grooming your kitten

Kitten 0-6m

Most cats can enjoy being groomed and, for some long-haired cats, it is a necessity. Grooming can be very bonding, and also provides an opportunity to give your cat a physical examination; look at its ears, eyes and mouth and check for fleas, ticks, ear mites or any lumps or bumps, or injuries to the skin.

- Even if your kitten does not need grooming yet, it is a good idea to teach positive associations with being groomed from a very early age.
  Be brief and gentle, and avoid tugging at tangles, hurting or frightening the kitten, as this can put it off being groomed for life.
- Start by simply stroking your cat with a couple of fingers to get your cat used to the feeling of being touched. Reward your cat with praise and small, tasty food treats for relaxed and calm behaviour.
- Next, touch the areas that your cat is most likely to enjoy such as the head, face and back. Once your cat is fully comfortable with these areas, you can move onto other areas such as the body, legs and belly.
- Many brushes and combs are available. Ensure the grooming brush you initially use is very soft (such as a baby toothbrush). If you have a long-haired cat, you will need a little more equipment than you would need for a kitten with short hair.
- Use food and/or treats to create positive associations with grooming equipment and the experience of being brushed. Rewards should come immediately after the presentation of the brush and after a couple of strokes of grooming, so your kitten learns that the brush and grooming predict the arrival of a reward.
- Gradually build up the amount of time you spend grooming your kitten. Grooming your entire kitten does not need to occur in one session. It may be easier for your kitten to accept several short sessions where only one body area is groomed at a time.

Use a soft toothbrush at first to allow the kitten to feel comfortable with grooming.

A kitten should never be forcibly groomed or stroked without the option to escape if it is finding the experience stressful.

For further information on grooming go to:
icatcare.org/advice/grooming-your-cat
icatcare.org/advice/handling-your-cat-for-grooming-video

Socialising your kitten

Helping your kitten to be relaxed and build positive associations with people, cats and dogs, is known as socialisation. Teaching cats to be comfortable with the environment around them, be it their home, grooming and handling interactions, travel and veterinary visits, and being calmly acceptance of anything new, is known as habituation. As with young puppies, kittens need to be socialised and habituated to the world in which they live. Every baby animal has what is known as a 'sensitive period' during which, if they have lots of positive experiences and limited or no stressful or negative experiences, they learn what is safe and need not be feared. These grow up to be resilient, confident and happy individuals, that make wonderful pets for life. In cats, the sensitive period is between two and seven or eight weeks, meaning that many kittens will be outside this special learning period by the time they come to your home. This does not mean that all is lost; there is plenty you can do and build on.

Positive experiences with humans, cats and dogs are the foundations of building good associations with handling, grooming, travel and veterinary visits.

It is important that kittens have lots of positive exposures and experiences. If, for any reason, your kitten seems timid, anxious or does not appear to cope easily, do not continue to socialise or habituate it without expert guidance to support you. Contact your vet, who can refer you to an appropriately qualified behaviourist or trainer (as is needed).

Choosing your cat from a reputable breeder or rescue centre should ensure that your have been well socialised and habituated in the first two months of life. You can continue with this following adoption, teaching your kitten about all aspects of its life in a calm and positive way, right through adolescence.

To ensure confident, behaviourally healthy cats, we can support kittens by introducing them to many different new things. Always allow the kitten to choose whether to approach or retreat, monitoring it to ensure it is calm, relaxed and in a positive frame of mind. Pair new things with good things, for example food or treats, play or stroking (if your kitten enjoys that).

There is plenty to do in helping your kitten feel really comfortable, calm and positive about new things in its world. We want kittens to be optimists! For example, playing recorded sounds, initially at a low volume, of children or babies, vacuum cleaners, telephones and washing machines, can be paired with good things to create positive associations with household items. Start slowly and gently with a variety of sights, sounds, scents and interactions. The kitten should not be overly excited or appear in any way worried or uncomfortable.

Keeping your kitten safe

All cats, and especially kittens, are curious and exploratory. Your kitten will be fascinated by everything. Think about the environment from your kitten's perspective — get down on your hands and knees and then look up high. Your kitten will soon be able to access high spaces too. Have you removed the hazards? Think about:

- **Washing machines and driers:** check the kitten is not inside before every use, and shut the door to keep the kitten out.
- **Hot hobs:** keep kittens off the worktops and cover hot hobs after use.
- **Fridge:** kittens can slip into fridges very easily, so check before you shut the door.
- **Fireplaces and chimneys:** dark places may be appealing to a timid kitten or curious one, so block access if possible.
- **Small gaps and holes:** block small gaps that lead to places where the kitten may get stuck.
- **Paper shredders:** a curious paw can be badly injured, so turn off between uses.
- **Concentrated washing powders, liquids and capsules:** spills or licks can cause burns so put these away safely with lids tightly on and clean up any spillages.
- **Plants and cut flowers:** kittens love to nibble so make sure your houseplants are non-toxic.

Remember that lilies are highly toxic to cats and should not be kept in the house with a kitten/cat. At Christmas time poisonous holly and mistletoe berries may fall off and be eaten. For more information go to: icatcare.org/advice/cats-and-poisonous-plants

- **Cleaners, bleaches and disinfectants:** some disinfectants are highly toxic to cats. Choose safe disinfectants and wipe away or rinse off any excess that the kitten could lick.

As cats groom they will ingest anything on their coat or feet.
For more information on poisons go to: icatcare.org/advice/cats-and-poisons

- **Sewing equipment:** kittens are fascinated by cotton. Playing can easily lead to swallowing thread and needles, so tidy away carefully.
- **Ironing boards and irons:** kittens love to jump onto high surfaces. Ironing boards can easily tip over and hot irons can cause burns.
- **Wires and cords:** some kittens like to chew wires with risks of electrocution, ingestion and strangulation. Use cord-tidies to remove temptation. Cords on blinds and net curtains can also become tangled around kittens.
- **Open windows:** kittens falling from windows can be seriously injured, so keep windows shut or buy screens and locks to prevent access. Similarly, balconies should be blocked off or covered with netting.
- **Garage hazards:** all spillages should be cleared up and any anti-freeze containing products must be locked away as these are highly toxic and can be attractive to drink.
- **Christmas trees:** a favourite for climbing, trees can fall over easily and glass baubles break. Tinsel can also be ingested and cause illness.

Letting your kitten go outside

Because of potential infection from diseases such as enteritis or cat flu, and because there are many hazards outside for a small kitten, your kitten should not be allowed outside until it has had at least two vaccinations (it is best to wait seven to 10 days after the second vaccine). If possible, wait until after it is neutered and has been microchipped or is used to wearing a collar as well. Most people will keep their kittens in until they are about six months old and have a little more sense than younger kittens.

Recall training

Long before letting your kitten out for the first time, teach your kitten a recall. This simply involves calling your kitten by its name or saying a word such as 'come', when you are right beside it. Each time it turns towards you, give a reward, such as a treat. Slowly build up to having a little distance between you, so that if you are only a few metres from your cat, it is likely to come to you and you can reward with a tasty treat or a meal (if you do this before mealtimes). Once the cat understands, the same word can then be used outside to encourage your cat to come in when you need it to.

Remember to always reward your cat for coming to ensure it continues to do so in the future. Never make it a negative experience, for example by only shutting the cat-flap. Instead, shut the cat-flap, then give your cat a long-lasting activity, such as a meal in a puzzle feeder or by treasure hunt.

Remember before allowing your new kitten to go out, ensure it has a means of identification, has had its vaccination and is neutered. For additional informaton got to: icatcare.org/advice/letting-your-cat-kitten-outside-for-the-first-time

- If possible, make the garden escape-proof or block obvious holes in fences.
- Choose a quiet time (so that the kitten is not frightened and runs off) to let the kitten explore the garden with you for a short period. Do not let the kitten wander away to where you can not catch it. Call the kitten in and reward it.
- Repeat the process, letting the kitten stay out with you a bit longer each time.
- It is always a good idea to have a litter tray indoors, regardless of whether your cat has outdoor access. If you would like your cat to toilet outdoors, encourage the kitten to use a freshly dug patch of earth in the garden. This will help to prevent the kitten wandering into other gardens in search of suitable soft earth.

If you intend to use a cat-flap, you will need to teach the kitten how to use it. For further advice go to: icatcare.org/advice/cat-flaps

- If you are going to prevent your cat going outside, for example at night, get it used to a predictable routine of when the cat flap is open. For example, if you allow your cat out during daylight hours, but keep it in at night, consider placing a

Allow the kitten to view the outside before you start to introduce it to your garden.

curtain or board over the cat-flap so it knows it will not open, and to relax instead of trying to go out.

- It is advisable to keep cats in at night, as this is when many cat fights occur (increasing the risk of infectious diseases, as well as injury) as well as road accidents. Get used to calling your cat in, rewarding it with a meal or treat and shutting it into the house at night. Keeping your cat inside at dawn and dusk may also help to reduce hunting.

If you are unable to let your cat go outside then you need to ensure that it can get stimulation and exercise indoors. Go to icatcare.org for lots of information on making your cat's environment interesting, and ensuring cats have plenty of opportunities to play, simulate hunting, explore and 'be a cat'.

Keeping your kitten healthy

Kitten 0-6m

When you first bring your kitten home you will ideally know what worming, flea treatments or vaccinations it has received. We recommend monthly visits to the vets to assess your kitten's health and build positive perceptions of being transported to, and the sights and smells of, the vets. It will likely take multiple trips, with lots of rewards and no bad things occurring, to create good associations.

Make the carrier a pleasant place to be. Put cat treats inside it and leave the door open at home to encourage the cat to go in and out and to sleep in it. For more advice on helping your cat be happy in the carrier go to:
icatcare.org/advice/encouraging-your-cat-to-be-happy-in-a-cat-carrier-video
icatcare.org/advice/putting-your-cat-in-a-cat-carrier-video

Encourage the kitten to feel comfortable with entering the cat carrier voluntarily.

Choosing a vet

Choosing a vet to register your kitten with is very important. It may seem logical to choose your nearest clinic. However, not all vets are equally educated to a high level in meeting cats' welfare, behaviour or species needs. It is best to find a veterinary team that is cat friendly and have put things in place to put cats at ease. Look for a clinic in your local area that is accredited as a Cat Friendly Clinic, this means the clinic follows the International Cat Care initiative to try to ensure they care for cats in the best possible way and make visits as stress free as possible.

Accredited Cat Friendly Clinics display this logo. Find one near you by visiting catfriendlyclinic.org

Use the seat belt to make sure the cat carrier is secure in the car.

Vaccinating your kitten

Vaccinating your cat helps to protect it against several serious and life-threatening diseases. Vaccination is given as an injection by a veterinarian under the skin (occasionally via drops into the nose and eyes) and provides crucial protection for cats against a number of diseases. Vaccines can be described as 'core' or 'non-core'. 'Core' vaccines are considered essential for all cats (including indoor-only cats) due to the severity of the disease being vaccinated against. 'Non-core' vaccines are used when the vet considers there is a risk of exposure to the infection and vaccination would provide good protection.

Core vaccines provide protection against:

- Feline panleukopenia virus (also known as, feline infectious enteritis or feline parvovirus)
- Feline herpesvirus (part of what is more commonly called cat flu)
- Feline calicivirus (part of what is more commonly called cat flu)
- Rabies (compulsory in some countries)

Non-core vaccines protect against:

- Feline leukaemia virus
- *Chlamydophila felis*
- *Bordetella bronchiseptica*

Decisions regarding requirement for non-core vaccines may be based on the cat's age, lifestyle and contact with other cats. You should always discuss with your vet what vaccines your own cat may require.

The initial kitten vaccine course is often started at eight to nine weeks of age, with a second injection three to four weeks later. It is now common also to recommend a third vaccination at 16 to 20 weeks of age to ensure the kitten is properly protected.

A first booster vaccination should be given at or after six months of age to ensure a good level of continuing protection. However, after that, the frequency of booster vaccinations may vary (every one to three years) depending on the vaccine, disease and risk to that individual cat (depending on its lifestyle and other factors). Your vet will discuss this with you to create the best plan for your Kitten.

Cats that stay at a boarding cattery will often require an annual vaccination (or booster vaccine before the cat goes into the cattery) as this is a higher risk situation.

For more information on vaccination schedules go to: icatcare.org/advice/keeping-your-cat-healthy/vaccinating-your-cat

Worming your kitten

The most common intestinal worms cats get are called roundworms and tapeworms. Roundworms are particularly common in kittens as they can passed to them via their mothers' milk. Most infected cats do not show signs of having worms; however, large numbers of worms can cause weight loss, sickness and diarrhoea, irritation around the anus and poor growth. Also, importantly, worms can be passed to humans, so regular treatment of your kitten is a must.

Ask the people from whom you are getting your kitten if they have treated the kitten for worms and what product they have used. Ask your vet to advise a product that is suitable for your kitten's age.

- Treat kittens for roundworms every two weeks from three weeks of age until eight weeks of age, then monthly to six months of age.
- Tapeworms are only usually a problem in older cats, unless a kitten also has fleas, so your kitten may not need treating specifically at a young age. Tapeworm treatment is commonly started from 12 weeks of age.
- In some countries regularly treatment for heartworm or lungworm is required so check with your vet if you live in an area where this is important.
- Once kittens are over six months of age treat every one to three months with a product that is effective against both tapeworms and roundworms. Monthly worm treatments are recommended if there are young children in the house or immunocompromised adults.

After giving or administering any preventive medication, such as worming medicine, it is a good idea to give your kitten a tasty treat to help it learn that tablets or spot-on treatments are nothing to fear — in fact they often mean that something really nice is on its way.

For a video on how to give your cat a tablet go to: icatcare.org/advice/how-to-give-your-cat-a-tablet

Treating your kitten for fleas

Ask the people from whom you are getting your kitten if they have treated the kitten for fleas and what product they have used. Fleas are very common and large numbers can cause serious problems in small kittens. Talk to your vet about suitable treatment when you have your first visit. It is best to treat your kitten even if you cannot see any sign of fleas, as fleas can

pass on tapeworms. Treating your kitten also ensures your home is not infested. Your vet can also advise if you have other pets.

NEVER be tempted to use a dog flea product on a cat as some of these can be highly toxic to cats (those that contain permethrin) and fatal on small kittens. Also avoid contact between a recently treated dog and the kitten. See: icatcare.org/avoiding-permethrin-and-controlling-fleas

After giving any preventive medication, such as flea treatments, it is a good idea to give your kitten a tasty treat to help it learn that tablets or spot-on treatments are nothing to fear and have positive associations.

Your kitten will need ongoing treatment for regular flea control. Always take your vet's advice on the best protocol for your kitten. For more information go to: icatcare.org/advice/fleas-and-flea-control-in-cats

Cleaning your kitten's teeth

Brushing a cat's teeth is likely to be the single most effective way to reduce dental plaque and maintain long-term oral health. Like humans, brushing will not only prevent plaque and tartar formation; it will also promote healthy gums. Daily or even twice daily brushing is recommended wherever possible, and this is best introduced at a young age when the kitten can quickly become accustomed to the procedure. It is important to use the correct equipment.

Never use human dental products on a cat. Specific animal dental products are readily available — ask your vet. See: icatcare.org/advice/how-to-brush-your-cats-teeth

Neutering your kitten

Kittens reach sexual maturity from five months of age and are therefore capable of breeding and producing kittens themselves. It is not recommended that you let your female kitten have a litter before it is neutered — there is no need, and it brings more kittens into a world where there are already many which do not find loving homes.

Neutering a cat; castration in the male (removal of the testes) and spaying the female (removal of the ovaries and uterus),

not only prevents unwanted pregnancies occurring, but also curbs unwanted behavioural patterns associated with sexual maturity and reduces the risk of certain diseases. Female cats should be neutered to prevent them having kittens, but also to prevent various diseases such as womb infections. Male cats, if unneutered, generally spray urine more frequently and have a pungent smell! They may also have more behavioural issues and fights, which increase the risk of them contracting infectious diseases, as well as increasing their tendency to wander and the risk of road accidents.

It is now recommended that kittens are neutered around four months of age. Neutering at this age does not pose any additional risks to their health and ensures that accidental litters do not occur.

Remember not to let your kitten go outside until it is vaccinated and neutered. More advice on neutering can be found at:
icatcare.org/advice/neutering-your-cat

Identifying your kitten

Identification is important if your cat goes missing. If you are using a collar, make sure to use the snap-open safe collars. Size and fit it properly and loosen it as the kitten grows. Collars do fall off and can be a hazard to adventurous cats if they get caught (hence the snap open safety feature) and are not a permanent identification. Placing a microchip under the kitten's skin in the 'scruff' region is a way to permanently identify your pet. The information is kept on a central database so ensure you update your details if you move to a new house. Your vet can microchip your kitten for you, either at a vaccination or health check appointment or when the kitten is neutered.

Collars can be used to identify cats but you need to make sure they have a snap open safety feature and are adjusted for size as the kitten grows.

For further advice on collar selection and microchipping go to:
icatcare.org/advice/collars
icatcare.org/advice/microchipping

Insuring your kitten

Pet insurance principally provides cover for veterinary fees if your cat is injured (it may also include other benefits such as covering the costs of advertising if your cat is lost or care for your cat should you be taken ill, as well as cover for behavioural treatment) or becomes sick. Kittens are very curious and often get themselves into trouble. The first year is the most hazardous so ensure your kitten as early as possible — this also means that there are unlikely to be pre-existing conditions, which can be excluded. An affordable and reliable pet

insurance policy can therefore provide peace of mind in the event of an emergency (if pet insurance is available in your country). Veterinary fees can get very expensive and knowing this will be covered should your kitten be taken ill, is very reassuring.

- Remember, not all pet insurance policies are the same or work in the same way. The cost of the policy will be based on your kitten's breed, where you live and the type of cover you choose. Always read the small print.
- Insure your kitten as soon as possible, because if insurance is taken out after an illness, then future similar illnesses may be excluded from cover.
- The cheapest policy may not be the best. Think about what you could afford in the event of a problem with your kitten.
- Consider duration of cover: lifetime cover means the condition will be covered for your cat's whole life, provided you renew the cover each year; per condition cover provides a maximum pay-out per condition over the cat's life. For example, should your cat develop a long-term condition (such as diabetes), lifetime cover will continue to fund the treatment.
- Twelve-month limit policies may be cheaper but if your cat develops a long-lasting condition, the insurance will only cover for that one year and you will not be able to cover it again as it will be a pre-existing condition on your next policy.
- Also consider the excess you will have to pay as well as the waiting period before the cover starts (usually 14 days) during which your kitten is not covered.
- Consider if other benefits are important to you, such as payment in the event of your cat's death or cover for holiday cancellation and cattery fees should your cat or yourself fall ill.

There are many pet insurers and types of insurance to choose from and, understandably, owners can get confused about the options and benefits available. For more information go to: icatcare.org/advice/guide-to-cat-insurance

A lifetime of support

As your kitten grows there are many things to consider about how to keep it happy and healthy in your environment and the lifestyle you give it. These are covered in depth on International Cat Care's website (icatcare.org).

Thank you to:

- Lucy Daniels who provided much of the photography in this booklet with the help of kitten models, Peggy and Luna.
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How old is your cat?

	Life stage	Age of cat	Human equivalent age
	Kitten Birth - 6 months	0-1 months 2 months 3 months 4 months 5 months 6 months	0-1 years 2 years 4 years 6 years 8 years 10 years
	Junior 7 months - 2 years	7 months 12 months 18 months 2 years	12 years 15 years 21 years 24 years
	Adult 3 - 6 years	3 years 4 years 5 years 6 years	28 years 32 years 36 years 40 years
	Mature 7 - 10 years	7 years 8 years 9 years 10 years	44 years 48 years 52 years 56 years
	Senior 11 - 14 years	11 years 12 years 13 years 14 years	60 years 64 years 68 years 72 years
	Super Senior 15 years +	15 years 16 years 17 years 18 years 19 years 20 years 21 years 22 years 23 years 24 years 25 years	76 years 80 years 84 years 88 years 92 years 96 years 100 years 104years 108 years 112 years 116 years