

HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS FOR FEEDING YOUR KITTEN

Start healthy feeding habits as soon as your kitten arrives! Excellent nutrition will influence your kitten's health status, development, appearance and attitude. How you feed your kitten will also help prevent excess weight gain during the growth stage and help reduce the likelihood of obesity as your kitten matures. Nutritional excellence is a key component of wellness medicine, where the goal is to prevent rather than treat health problems later in life. The following tips will get you off to a great start. Contact your veterinarian with any concerns or questions.

Choose your kitten's diet carefully:

- There is excessive and confusing information in the market regarding kitten foods. The old adage "you get what you pay for" applies particularly well to pet foods. We encourage you not to compare foods by the "Guaranteed Analysis" on the label. This is based on a chemical analysis only and measures gross quantities of ingredient classes- therefore it tells you nothing about the quality or digestibility of the ingredients. Highly digestible kitten food means you feed less. You should expect to pay from \$0.25-\$1.00/day to feed your kitten (depending on canned and dry proportions). Be sure to feed your kitten a diet that has successfully completed an AAFCO growth trial.

Benefits of excellent nutrition:

- Feline Development Formula is one of the highly recommended kitten foods, it has exceptional nutritional quality. While eating this diet, we expect your kitten to have a luxurious, shiny coat, to be bright and lively, have strong healthy teeth and gums, and make small, well-formed stools. Superior nutrition helps kittens build bone, muscle, tissue, and boost their immune system to help fight disease.

Feed your kitten as an individual:

- Feed your kitten frequent, small meals if possible. Your kitten has a small stomach and high energy needs. You can leave small quantities of dry food out constantly and let your kitten "nibble on the kibble" as desired. Monitor your kitten's weight/appearance. You should see a lean, well-conditioned body and be able to feel but not see its ribs. Adjustments in the amount of food left out may be necessary to prevent your kitten from becoming overweight, particularly between 4-9 months of age.

Avoid feeding your kitten "human food":

- Establishing right from the start that "human food" is off-limits will reduce begging and an increased risk of obesity. It also minimizes the chances of cats becoming very picky eaters. If you must feed some human food, stick to small amounts of cooked lean meat and always put them in your kitten's bowl. Never feed your kitten from the counter or table.

Feed some canned food:

- While you may prefer to feed your kitten dry food, you should always introduce some canned food (even just a tablespoon a day). Cats are very sensitive to the “mouth feel” of the food they eat. As cats age, they sometimes develop medical conditions that are better managed by increasing their water intake. Feeding canned food is the best way to increase water intake. Cats that have never been exposed to canned foods as kittens often refuse to eat them later in life, when they may be extremely beneficial.

Where to feed your kitten:

- Feed your kitten in a quiet place. This helps to establish consistency, reduces excitement around a meal and helps reduce the incidence of stomach upset. Ensure that the feeding area is not in close proximity to the litter box- it may interfere with litter box training.

Measure the food, and feed in your kitten’s own bowl:

- Always measure your kitten’s food so that you can make appropriate adjustments as necessary depending on your kitten’s body condition. If you have other cats in your home, feed your kitten separately, from its own bowl. Kitten foods are formulated to be optimum for growing kittens; you do not want your adult cats eating kitten food and vice versa. Dry diets can be moistened to soften them for very young kittens.

Change diets slowly:

- If you are changing your kitten’s diet, gradually introduce the new diet over 7-10 days. Mix a small amount (1/4 ratio) with the previous diet for the first day or two. Then increase the portion of the new diet over the next week, until your kitten is only eating the new diet. This will reduce the likelihood of vomiting and diarrhea. Your kitten should make formed stools that are easy to scoop up. Please inform your veterinarian if this is not the case.

Milk:

- Cow’s milk is not recommended for kittens. In fact, many kittens cannot digest milk and may develop diarrhea, as a result. All your kitten needs to drink is fresh, clean water.

Treats:

- More and more of us are enjoying the use of treats to socialize, train and just plain love our kittens. Ask us about healthy, low calorie treats for your kitten. Treats can be moistened to soften them for very young kittens.

How long to feed kitten food:

- Your kitten should be fed kitten food exclusively until 9-12 months of age. This will help optimize bone and soft tissue development. Adult cat foods are often more urine acidifying and restricted in minerals, this could interfere with the optimum bone development in growing kittens.

(This information is from Medi-Cal, Royal Canin Veterinary Diet.)