

## Kitten Nutrition

Kittens are precious bundles of fur, but underneath all that fluff, they have a lot of growing up to do. In a relatively short timeframe (just 8-12 months), they rapidly develop muscles, bones, skin and coat, teeth, and internal organs, as well as important socialisation skills. So, getting your young kitten's diet right at this early stage, will help way beyond their first few months of life.



### Birth to weaning

A kitten's survival instinct kicks in quickly. Soon after birth newborns will try to find mum's milk supply. This is a crucial time as the mother will have produced a special type of milk called colostrum, which helps support the immune system. During the first few weeks of life, most kittens will nurse at least four to six times per day. In the case of orphaned kittens, mum lacking milk, or kittens failing to latch on, kitten formula/milk replacer should be given.

At this delicate age, the two most important activities for any kitten are eating and sleeping. Fast forward to around week three or four and a kitten's nutritional requirements change; their mother's milk production naturally lessens while the kittens' ability to digest lactose also decreases. From this point, it is important to gradually introduce a fully balanced and complete kitten diet, especially designed to meet kittens' nutritional needs, providing sufficient energy and highly digestible nutrients.

### Introducing the new diet – slowly does it

A Kitten diet should be introduced gradually. Simply combine a Kitten formula/milk with a wet or dry 'complete' Kitten diet, mixing it into a gruel. Cow and goat's milk should not be used as they cannot be digested as well. Use a shallow dish to allow the kittens easy access to the food.

Feeding the lactating mum and kitten the same **complete kitten food** will help in the early stages of weaning with familiarity of the food.

With time, slowly replace the milk with water (if feeding a dry food) until only feeding the solid food at around 6 weeks of age. At this point all kittens should be fully weaned, happily eating a specially formulated Kitten diet. Always make sure your kitten has a good supply of fresh drinking water available.



### How much to feed?

For guidance on how much to feed, start by following the manufacturers feeding guides which are printed on packs. Weigh their daily food ration using an accurate kitchen scale to ensure they receive the correct amount of energy and nutrients. While products' feeding guidelines are a good starting point, remember that all animals are unique and calorie intake should be adjusted according to individual needs. Monitor your kitten's body condition and if you have concerns, seek advice from your vet.

To see all PFMA factsheets and posters  
please visit [www.pfma.org.uk/fact-sheets](http://www.pfma.org.uk/fact-sheets)



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More advice on diets and nutrition can be found at [www.pfma.org.uk/](http://www.pfma.org.uk/)



### How to feed

Kittens need and enjoy being fed little and often, dividing small portions from their daily food ration at regular intervals throughout the day.

By the time the kitten reaches 6 months of age they can transition onto 2 meals a day, but keep in mind that cats generally, being natural grazers, prefer to eat little and often. However, always take care not to overfeed: keep the cat to the same daily ration but divide this into several meals a day.

If feeding wet food, any leftover food should be cleared away after 30 minutes, but dry food can be left out for longer.



### Moving from kitten on to adult food

Once kittens have reached 90% of their expected adult weight, they can switch from a Kitten diet designed for growth, to a maintenance diet intended for adulthood.

A change from one food to another should be done gradually (over 5-7 days), increasing the quantity of the new food, and reducing the current food, each day until only the new food is given. This will help avoid an upset digestive system often associated with a sudden diet change.

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### What about neutering and diet?

Most domestic cats are neutered around 4-6 months of age. After neutering their energy requirements mitigate and owners will need to adapt the diet to reduce the risk of unnecessary weight gain. Use the **PFMA Cat Size-O-Meter** to help monitor your cat's body condition once neutered. If you notice your cat is gaining weight simply discuss it with your vet team.



### To supplement or not to supplement – that is the question

There is no need to supplement a complete and balanced kitten diet. In fact, supplementing can be detrimental, leading to growth abnormalities. Simply invest in a good quality complete and balanced diet designed to help support healthy growth and development.

### Kitten welfare

A cat should be at least 8 weeks old before leaving its mother. Welfare charities such as Cats Protection, International Cat Care and RSPCA, provide tips and guidance on how to source a kitten responsibly. Keep your veterinary team involved throughout kittenhood to receive advice on when to vaccinate and neuter, and to regularly check your kitten's health.

