



FEEDING YOUR KITTEN

The first year is the most important for a kitten. Major development is determined in those fifty-two weeks. This first year is critical because during that time of growth from infancy through the equivalent of childhood and then on to young adulthood. That's why it is especially important to feed a high quality food to your kitten. The best nutrition possible is needed to build strong bones, good muscles, a well-developed nervous system, and provide the energy needed during that first year.

A kitten's normal weight practically triples during the first three weeks of life. In the first 20 weeks, a kitten can have a 2,000 percent increase over his birth weight. At 26 weeks, the visible growth rate starts to level off, and there will be more of an appearance of an adult cat. However, the kitten continues to develop inside – the bones become stronger and the body fills out – until one year of age

Extensive studies show that a kitten's rapid growth and high energy level require food that will give extra nutrition and calories. And since the stomach is small, it's difficult just to eat more food to get the needed calories. The kitten's correct development requires protein, calcium, iron, phosphorous, and many other nutrients as part of a complete and balanced diet. It is important to use a food specially formulated for kittens. Kittens, like babies, need their own special food.

Supplementation of the food often upsets the nutrient balance. Too much of anything can be harmful, and often leads to other health problems. Do not feed additional supplements unless recommended by your veterinarian.

WHAT ABOUT LABELS? Everyone is more conscious these days of package content labels because we know that proper nutrition is so important to leading a healthy life. That is why you should read the label on your kitten's food. It provides a guaranteed nutrient analysis and ingredient list. It states the minimum levels of crude fat and protein and the maximum amounts of crude fiber and moisture.

The label should indicate whether the product provides complete and balanced nutrition and is adequate for all life stages or for just a particular life stage, such as "kitten" or "adult." The label should indicate if the product has undergone actual feeding studies. If the pet food does not provide complete and balanced nutrition, the label must read "not to be fed as a sole diet," or words with similar meaning.

FEEDING RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Place your kitten's food and water dishes away from foot traffic and noise, in a place which is comfortable and easy for him to reach. Putting newspapers or a plastic mat under the dishes will make cleanup easier. *Feed in the same place all the time*, and always keep dishes clean and stocked with fresh food and water.
2. Establish a routine so that your kitten is fed at the same time every day. Give three (3) meals a day, if at all possible until six (6) months of age. At 6 months, your kitten will closely resemble adult size, but don't be misled. There still a lot of growing up and filling out to occur. Now meals can be fed only twice (2) daily, but be sure to continue the kitten diet until one year of age.

3. It is acceptable to feed only dry food during the first few months if it is softened with water. However, it is also acceptable to feed either canned food or a mixture of both. By seven (7) months of age, most of your kitten's permanent teeth should have grown in. One of the advantages of feeding dry food, apart from the convenience, is that dry food can help decrease the rate of tartar accumulation on the teeth.
4. Do not worry if your kitten's appetite decreases slightly between the ages of four (4) and seven (7) months. As baby teeth fall out, eating may decrease because the gums are sore.
5. For a proper feeding program, use only **high quality** commercial foods and follow the package directions for the amounts recommended for the various age levels. Make any changes in foods gradually by mixing the old and new food over a 2 week period to avoid gastrointestinal upsets. Cats do NOT require a variable diet, and the least problems occur when the same food is fed all the time.

