

WHEN DO KITTENS OPEN THEIR EYES: UNWEANED KITTEN CARE

Born unable to hear or see, newborn kittens are entirely dependent on their mother’s milk for nourishment. Around four weeks of age, they will gradually begin to eat solid food, and they are fully weaned around eight weeks of age. The mother is also busy round the clock protecting her kittens and keeping them warm and clean, teaching them basic socialisation skills and helping them to urinate and defecate in the first three weeks. Should you come across a kitten she seems to have left behind, or if your cat is unable to care for her litter, you may need to look after the kittens yourself. In this case you will have to take over very quickly, especially if your kitten’s eyes are still closed, which means that the kittens are less than two weeks old. Taking over the mother cat’s role is a full-time job and requires a great deal of care and patience, especially in the first four weeks, but it can be very rewarding. Follow Perfect Fit’s practical guidelines on how to care for unweaned kittens to help your little felines grow into happy, healthy cats.

Newborn Kittens: When do baby kittens open their

eyes and start walking?

When do kittens open their eyes? It can vary from 2 days to two weeks, depending on your newborn kitten's development. Straight after being born and for the first week of their lives, your gentle little cat will need constant care.

When kittens are born, their eyes are closed, their ears are folded, and they can't regulate their body temperature. Their umbilical cord is still attached to their placenta, too. Their mother will chew the umbilical cord to remove the placenta as she cleans her kitten to stimulate their first breaths.

The remaining piece of the umbilical cord falls off naturally around 4-5 days after birth and should never be forced off. Most newborn kittens are gently opening their eyelids from 7 days and all their blue-eyed wonder can be seen from two weeks.

It's about a week when they first start to try and find their feet. They'll be wobbly and unsure at first. So, give them ample space to explore and develop.

The first two weeks are just the start. There are so many more heartwarming moments and milestones ahead, and this is how to look after a kitten through each one of them.

Developmental and behavioral milestones

Newborn kittens, like us humans, have developmental milestones you can tick off to make sure they're heading in the right direction and you don't have anything to worry about.

When do kittens open their eyes? It's between 7 days to a fortnight and they'll start to explore, albeit at a wobbly pace, their surroundings. Their ears unfold around three weeks, giving you that cute pointy look and it's at that time their first teeth will emerge, their incisors. They may also start interacting with their litterbox.

After a month, you'll notice more teeth, this time canines, with their vision improving greatly and their walking and coordination becoming more confident. This is when they're most likely to start having fun with you, too.

They'll be running, rolling, and really playful with you. They'll also start to eat solid food with premolars coming through around 5 weeks and all 26 deciduous teeth present from 6 to 12 weeks.

Between 6 and 8 weeks old, your newborn kitten will be a confident, coordinated walker and eater, super playful and social, and you'll notice them lose their blue eye colour and transition to their adult hue.

Three months old is usually when kittens can go outside and this is generally considered the time when your kitten is becoming an adult cat.

However, to get us started, this is how to look after a kitten from day one.

Newborn kittens

When do kittens open their eyes? When they're born, their eyes are closed, ears folded, umbilical cord attached, and they're unable to regulate their body temperature.

At birth, newborn kittens can’t see or hear and can only interact with the world and you through scent. Their temperature will be between 95-100 centigrade and they need a gentle heat source to stay warm. That should be between 85-90 centigrade.

Newborn kittens will feed entirely from their mum. If you suspect a problem with milk production, consult your vet for advice. Cat replacement kitten milk is available if bottle feeding is required.

Carefully feed them, too, as they are unable to throw anything back up if they consume too quickly. Their umbilical cord will dry out around 5 days old and naturally fall off.

Can kittens have milk? If it’s cow’s milk, then newborn kittens certainly can’t as they need the feline milk from their mother cat, which supplies them with immunity antibodies as at this point they are unable to produce them on their own.

If the mother cat has too many kittens to feed satisfactorily, you can supplement their feeding with specially formulated kitten milk. However, this should only be on the advice of your vet as each situation needs careful consideration.

They’ll also need regular feeding. Usually every 2 hours. Plus, newborn cats need to be stimulated to urinate or defecate. If you’re asking when can kittens leave their mother? The answer is that they are months away, as it’s generally considered that 12 to 14 weeks is the prime amount of time for a kitten to mature into an adult cat.

Looking for that new kitten checklist? Here’s everything you need for your new kitten!

One week

When do kittens open their eyes? It tends to be around one week old, but don’t worry if they don’t. Some younger cats can be up to 14 days before you see their blue eyes, which all kittens will have. This will change when they become an adult cat.

Ear canals start to open but their ears will remain folded and they should have doubled their birth weight by now.

Can kittens have milk? At this point, they still need their mother's milk or to be supplemented by formulated kitten milk to help them gain the nutrients and antibodies they require.

And they’re still unable to regulate their body temperature, so a stable and safe heat source should still be their main space. Keep it at 85 centigrade.

Toileting stimulation to urinate and defecate is still needed frequently and feeds every 2-3 hours are necessary, including during the night. But providing they are with their mum and all is well, she will be taking good care of these needs.

Two weeks

After two weeks, your kitten’s eyes should be open and their ears fully unfolded, although both are still developing. You should have the classic cute kitten look!

They’ll be attempting to walk but will be wobbly on their feet, with their general coordination and activity still unstable. Give them plenty of watch and care when they're

moving around, but let them go at their own pace.

What about now - can kittens have milk? Sorry, but it’s still a no. Cow milk or any other form of the white stuff could potentially harm your kitten. Always use the cat mother’s milk or, failing that, a specially formulated kitten milk.

A stable and safe heat source is still needed as their body temperature can’t be regulated just yet. Although it can be decreased to around 80 centigrade.

They still help and stimulate going to the toilet, with time between feeding sessions lengthening to around 3-4 hours.

If you’re wondering when can kittens leave their mother? Two weeks is still far too early…

When can a kitten leave its mother

When can kittens leave their mother? Newborn kittens need to be with their mum for at least 10-12 weeks, but ideally for three months, which is when eyesight and hearing are developed and the cat is confident in moving, playing and eating.

They’re also really accustomed to their litter box and can regulate their body temperature without an external heat source.

The mother cat also plays a vital role in boosting their little kitty’s immune system, as the mother’s milk provides all of the fundamental nutrients and antibodies.

Allowing your kitten to stay with their mother for up to 12 to 14 weeks has shown real health and social benefits for the kitten. They learn how to interact with you and the world around them by watching their mum, learning important survival skills and emotional cues too.

Here are some further steps on how to look after a kitten.

Feeding unweaned kitten care

What do unweaned kittens eat?

By this time, your kittens are probably very hungry and letting you know that their little tummies are empty by meowing pitifully. However, do not rush to give them a bowl of milk or cat food, which will do them more harm than good.

Under normal circumstances, a kitten exclusively needs its mother’s milk from birth to around four weeks of age. Until this time, your kittens should not eat any solid food. If they are less than four weeks old, you will need to bottle feed them with kitten milk replacement formula. Ask your vet to recommend the best formula for them. Follow the recommended quantity of milk and frequency of feedings indicated on the packaging.

How to bottle-feed a kitten?

Once you have made up a bottle of kitten milk replacement formula, heat it up slightly by running it under warm water or setting it in a glass of warm water. Place your kitty on their

tummy and gently open their mouth with your finger and insert the nipple. Hold the bottle at a 45-degree angle to minimize kitty taking in air along with the formula. If they seem to have trouble with the bottle, you could try using an eye-dropper or syringe. Once they have finished, take a warm damp cloth and clean their face. Also wiping a soft, warm damp cloth around your kitten's abdomen and anal region to stimulate them to pass urine and faeces.

A newborn kitten may need to eat around 6/8 times a day or every four hours, and less frequently after the first 2 weeks. Don't worry: you will probably have no problem knowing when they need feeding as a hungry kitten can be quite loud! Try and make feeding time relaxing for all of you, by feeding them in a quiet place and making sure that you are comfortable too. If the kittens are waking you up during the night, keep in mind that eventually the kittens will be able to sleep through the night. You should find a way to regularly and accurately weigh the kittens to ensure that they are gaining weight appropriately. (See our recommended weight chart).

Note: never give newborn kittens any milk other than kitten replacement milk formula, as it is highly likely to upset their delicate stomachs.

Take advantage of this suckling time to create a moment to stimulate the kitten's senses, just as their mother would during feeding. If their mother is not there, you may stimulate their visual, hearing and touch senses by petting them, handling them and talking to them gently when they are awake.

Transitioning to solid food: exploring new textures and smells

The transition to solid food occurs over a period from four to seven weeks old. At four weeks old, you may begin to mix a little wet food with the formula to create a kind of mush. Let your kittens get used to the taste and gradually increase the amount of wet food. At around 5 or 6 weeks, you may begin to introduce dry food, softened with water. Make sure to choose good quality food specially formulated to meet your kittens' specific nutritional needs. By 7 to 8 weeks, your kittens should be weaned and eating only solid food.

Unweaned kitten care in summary

Caring for unweaned kittens that have left their mother early is a delicate process, but we hope you now have the information you need to do it yourself. Just remember these key points.

- Feed them regularly and slowly
- Keep warm with an external heat source
- Only ever feed them with specially formulated cat milk
- Allow them to develop naturally. Never pry open eyes or ears or force off an umbilical cord.

For further pointers, please see our new kitten checklist, which includes everything you need for your new kitten.

Unweaned kitten care - FAQs

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1. **Can unweaned kittens drink water?**

   No, as you risk injury or death through water inhalation. Unweaned kittens should get enough hydration from their mother’s milk or a specially formulated kitten milk.

2. **How do you take care of a weak kitten?**

   You keep the kitten warm with a gentle heat source, gently and slowly feed them, and stimulate their genitalia to help with urinating or defecating. If your kitten is unresponsive or tepid, contact a vet immediately.

3. **At what age can kittens urinate on their own?**

   Newborn kittens tend to start urinating independently from 3 weeks old, with self-controlled litter visits confidently performed a week later. Before this, their genitalia needs to be gently stimulated by their mum to help them urinate and defecate.

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