

Early Development for Kittens

BEHAVIOR SERIES



To any cat enthusiast, kittens are an irresistible, adorable, sweet perfection in a furry little ball. But when adopted, their angelic appearance can soon be replaced by the realities of owning an energetic young kitten. There are ways to prevent this adoration from turning into frustration. Gaining a better understanding of the feline species and providing for your kitten's needs with appropriate training and structure will ensure a smoother introduction of your new kitten to your family.

Locomotion

- At 6 to 7 weeks of age, kittens can perform all the gaits associated with adult movement
- More difficult maneuvers may not be mastered until 10 to 11 weeks of age
- Breakable items should be moved out of reach

Eyesight

- Though kittens are born with their eyelids closed, they usually open within the first 2 weeks after birth
- Visual clarity greatly improves within the first month of life, and continues to improve during the following 8 to 10 weeks

Hunting

- Hunting is a normal feline behavior
- Limiting access to prey by keeping your cat indoors at all times is the most successful way to manage this behavior
- Cats with outdoor access can wear bells on cat-designed break-away collars to help warn prey, but many belled cats are still successful hunters

Weaning

- Weaning, which starts at about 4 to 5 weeks of age, is usually completed by 7 to 8 weeks of age
- Kittens should not be removed from the mother until weaning is completed, meaning the kitten can eat solid cat food

Learning and social development

- Kittens are very good observational learners. In other words, they are true copycats.
- Cats can also be trained with classical and operant conditioning, techniques we associate with dog training. The use of positive reinforcement or reward-based training is the most effective and humane way to train kittens.
- The first 7 to 8 weeks of age is the critical time to start teaching your kitten appropriate behaviors
- Ask your Banfield medical team for kitten socialization and kitten litter box training information

Social play

- Play is an important part of the kitten's physical and behavioral development
- Social play increases from 4 to 13 weeks of age and then starts to decline
- Object play significantly increases at 7 to 8 weeks of age
- Normal kitten play includes predatory type behaviors like stalking and pouncing



For additional information, please contact your Banfield medical team.