

KITTENS ARE MADE OF LOVE, POOP, TEETH AND CLAWS

By Julia Murray DVM

Little kittens, from six to twelve weeks of age, need a quiet environment full of love and tenderness. It is difficult for them to leave the comfort and protection provided by their mother. Dehydration, exhaustion and stress are difficult to avoid. It helps the kitten to have a cardboard box, hot water bottle wrapped in a furry blanket, and a diet of mostly canned food. They need to be protected from little children, big feet, and falling furniture. Pick them up gently and slowly so they don't feel afraid. They are babies and need to be loved.

Baby kittens often get wet feet in the litter box. If the litter is the clumping type it can stick to the wet fur. When the kitten tries to clean itself the clumping litter gets into the digestive tract and turns into clay. The delicate intestinal tract cannot handle the heavy clay which can cause serious constipation. Please do not use clumping cat litter for little kittens.

Like toddlers who are toilet training, kittens like to stay where the action is in the house. When they are busy playing or snuggling, they will not leave the room to find the litter box. During early training, keep a litter box in each area of the house, particularly in the busiest rooms and near the food. Gradually move the boxes to where you want them to stay. By six months of age the kitten should be able to go to the litter box when necessary. Make sure there is always a box in areas of the house where the kitten/cat may inadvertently get trapped behind a closed door.

Juvenile kittens are driven by two major components of natural cat life: killing and climbing. Cats are predators and naturally hunt and kill their food. When kittens play, they are practicing stalking and killing. Anything that moves is fair game. If it happens to be your body parts that are under attack the wisest response is to play dead. Try not to react to being bitten. The predator will quickly lose interest if your body refuses to play. Keep lots of toys conveniently handy to help divert the kitten's attention. If your kitten attacks you when in bad at night, then shut it out of your room to avoid injury.

In nature the juvenile kitten needs to learn to run up trees for safety. The closest thing to a tree in your house is your furniture and drapery. The three to five-month-old kitten needs to practice climbing and jumping. The claws are used for friction and to prevent falling. It may help to keep the claws tips trimmed but try to enjoy this time of development as it will not last long. The evening "crazy time" provides the family with laughter and fun. To discourage the young cat from climbing or sharpening claws on special places try using double sided sticky tape on your furniture. They do not like the feel and it works even when you are not there. Remember to provide suitable scratching places that your young cat is allowed to use and do not throw out the favorite scratching chair when you get new furniture.