



Weaning Kittens

Most adult female cats give birth to anywhere from one to eight kittens at a time and can give birth to up to 100 kittens in their lifetime. The most kittens born to an adult cat in its lifetime was 420, an average of 25 kittens born to the cat per year. When cats are born, their food is a special condensed milk called colostrum, which contains antibodies to help fight disease. If the mother cat, or the “queen” as she is sometimes called, has had vaccinations, her young will receive the same immunities from drinking her milk until they are ready to get shots on their own. The mother needs to allow her young to drink her milk for a certain period of time, usually a few weeks, to give them the nutrition they need to progress to the next stage of their young lives and build up their immune systems.

Just born kittens feed on their mother’s milk avariciously at every opportunity. After that few weeks is over, it can sometimes be a challenge to convince a kitten that it’s time to give up the milk from its mommy and start eating regular dry kitten food. Here are some tips for weaning kittens.

The mother will be able to tell you that it’s time to start feeding the kittens real, solid food. She will become annoyed whenever they approach her and most likely hiss at them to go away. This is when it becomes necessary to take steps towards feeding them their new diet of meats and dry cat food. They will probably seem lost, so it is your responsibility to provide them with their new source of food.

A challenge for some kittens is that they have a hard time switching to an eating position where their head is down. The solution to this problem is to put some food on your finger and put it slightly above their head level for them to eat. Gradually bring the finger down until it is at the same level as a food bowl. Soon you should be able to get them to eat from a bowl of the same food placed in front of them. You can even do this “finger feeding” while they are sucking on their mother’s nipple to get them interested in meat over milk slowly but surely.

Some very resistant kittens will cry and moan incessantly for their mother's milk, even when it is past their time to start eating regular food. How do you handle this? You must gradually introduce solid food into their diet. Mixing the soft meaty food with warm water at first will help them chew and digest the food easily. The mushy consistency is closer to the feel of a mother's milk, and makes the transition smoother for a stubborn kitty. As they get used to the new food, put less and less water in it until you don't have to put water in the food at all to get them to eat it. You can also start off by putting formula in their bowl, so that they can get used to eating away from their mother, and then moving to solids in the bowl. Kittens will quickly give up the milk once they realize how good and tasty meat is. They are instinctual meat eaters.

It is not recommended that you give your kitten, or any cat for that matter, cow's milk. Cow's milk does not contain the same nutrients present in a cat's mother's milk. Cats lack the enzymes needed to process and digest cow's milk. It will most likely give them stomach trouble and in some cases diarrhea. When weaning kittens you do not want to create problems with their digestive system.

Once weaned, cats must be fed a balanced diet rich in proteins, vitamins, and calories. Most pet food companies sell products specially formulated to meet the needs of a growing kitten. Thus, a cat food for "senior" cats will probably not provide a kitten with the proper nutrition it needs, and vice versa. Invest in a high quality kitten food containing high levels of protein, fat to increase their energy, fatty acids, and extra vitamins and minerals for their teeth and bones. A couple of foods that come highly recommended by cat lovers are Nutro Natural Choice Kitten Food and Felidae Kitten Formula.

Many experts say that it is best to feed a kitten wet food, not dry food, due to the fact that most dry food contains too many fillers that are not healthy for cats. Some fillers that you will frequently see listed on bags of dry cat food are corn gluten, poultry by-products, brewer's rice, soybean meal, corn meal, and wheat gluten. Cheap dry food is responsible for many health problems in cats, including diarrhea, urinary crystals, and even feline diabetes. On the other hand, wet food is made mostly of meat with natural proteins, vitamins, and minerals that a kitten needs to grow strong. If you think about it, cats are in the same family as tigers, lions, and panthers—meat-eaters. You wouldn't feed a tiger dry food on a daily basis, so why do it with a smaller version of this carnivorous animal? Cats want meat because it is the best nutrition for them.

If at all possible, avoid cat foods that contain wheat gluten, a product that was the focus of the huge pet food recall that occurred recently. It was discovered that one specific source of the wheat gluten was responsible for adding contaminants to the product, and the contaminated food was reaching the pet food supply all over the world. While the problem is considered solved, it is still a safer bet to find natural pet food products that don't contain the substance.

Weaning is a process that sometimes takes weeks to accomplish, but it can be done. You don't want your three-month-old kitten still trying to suck on his mother's nipples! (I sincerely doubt that the mother would allow this anyway.) So be proactive about weaning kittens onto solid food when it is appropriate.