



House Paws Home Veterinary Care  
(651) 283-7216  
housepawsmn.com

## Welcoming Home Your New Kitten

You just picked up your kitten, and you're so excited about your new furry family member! But how do you do introduce your kitten to her new home without overwhelming her? And how do you make sure that she transitions to her new surroundings without any problems? This article contains several tips to guide you through that initial adjustment period to help your new kitten feel safe and secure in your home.

### Go slowly

When you first bring your kitten into your home, take time to gradually walk her through one room at a time. Place her carrier in each room as you go, so she can retreat to a safe space if she wants. Speak to her softly, and give her time to explore. If there are spaces that you don't want her to go, make sure to gently remove her from those spaces. If she wants to hide in her carrier or another place that makes her feel safe, give her time to do so.

Kittens are undeniably cute, and everyone is going to want to spend time with your new little furball. But imagine how overwhelming this would be for her. She's in an unfamiliar environment, surrounded by strange people and possibly other animals. Give her time to warm up to her new home. It's best to limit handling of your new kitten for the first couple days. Only introduce one person at a time to your kitten, and encourage her to come to you rather than you to her. Ask friends and neighbors to wait a couple weeks before coming over for a visit.

It may be best to keep your kitten away from young children under five. Toddlers can be rough and may not understand how to hold or interact with a cat. Teach your children how to properly hold the kitten, and explain that they should never pick her up by her tail or ears. Make sure that young kids always wash their hands after handling the kitten, and supervise them closely when they are interacting with her.

Some kittens, especially shyer ones, will be very anxious at first. It's possible that your kitten won't want to eat her food or may experience diarrhea (from stress) in the first couple of days. If this continues past 48 hours, you may want to consult your veterinarian.

### Give your kitten a safe place

Whether your kitten spent her first several weeks of life with her mom and siblings or in a shelter, she will likely be scared at first in her new home. Give her a space where she can feel warm and secure, such as a box or bed lined with a blanket. Provide spaces to hide, such as a sheet draped over a chair, but remove any large pieces of furniture. If your kitty always runs under the bed or behind the dresser, interaction between the two of you will become difficult. Sometimes putting a piece of clothing

with your scent on it in your kitten's safe room will help her become comfortable with you.

Make sure your kitten's safe space is in a quiet room, away from the hustle and bustle. Her litter box, food and water should also be away from household traffic, so that she can feel comfortable and safe while eating and using the box. This will also help with litter box training. Just make sure that the litter box is on the other side of the room, away from the food and water. If you are gone for long periods of time, put your kitten in her safe place with the door closed. Softly playing classical music or a talk show may help to keep her calm while you're gone.

During the first few days or so, you'll want to keep your kitten primarily confined to her safe room. This will give you time to build a trusting relationship without overwhelming her. When she is ready to explore the house, allow her to do so slowly. Close most of the doors, and only give her access to one new space. Integrating your new kitten may take just a couple days, or it may take weeks. The length of this process will depend on your new kitten's personality, as well as the behavior of any other pets in the home. Go at your pets' paces. Don't rush anything, and make sure all animals in the house are comfortable.

### **Bring your kitten to the vet**

You want your new kitten to be healthy and happy, right from the start. A wellness exam with the vet is the first step towards achieving this goal. A veterinarian will make sure that your kitten has any needed vaccinations and will check for ear mites and fleas. Your kitten will also need to be dewormed. Your vet can answer any questions you have about caring for your kitten and helping her adjust to her new home.

If you have other pets in the home, you'll also want to make sure that they are healthy and current on vaccines before you bring your new kitten home.

### **Don't change her food right away**

You may not want to keep your kitten on the food that she was sent home with. But don't make an outright diet switch, or you may end up with a sick and stressed out kitty. Slowly transition your kitten over to her new food by mixing more and more of the new food with smaller amounts of her old food over the course of a week. This will make the change easier on her digestive system. Make sure that her new food is appropriate for a kitten. Like humans, growing kitties have different nutrient needs than adult cats. Ask your vet for recommendations of a high-quality kitten diet.

### **Choose the litter box location wisely**

Your kitten may not be litter box-trained right away. Teaching her to use the litter box will go smoother if you put the box in a secluded area (her safe place). If she doesn't instinctively use the box, you may need to encourage her. After a nap or soon after mealtime, gently place your kitten in the box. She may start to dig and scratch, but if she doesn't you can take a paw and "dig" with it. Praise your kitten when she uses the box, but don't scold her if she doesn't. Training her may take time, and she will respond better to praise than to discipline.

## **Provide an outlet**

Scratching is a natural feline tendency that has been proven to be very beneficial for cats. Not only does this engage cat instincts, it also helps keep their claws shorter. Make sure that your kitten has an unused scratching post in her safe room to encourage healthy scratching behaviors. If your cat doesn't seem interested in the post you picked out, try another. There are many different varieties of scratching posts, and some cats have preferences. This will also keep your kitten from scratching up your nice furniture!

## **Cat-proof your home**

Keep any cords out of reach — these may look like play toys to a kitten, but a cat could be tangled in anything that swings or hangs down. Many cats are also fascinated by electrical cords. Keep chargers, lamp cords, etc. out of reach. Sometimes it's impossible to prevent your cat from accessing a cord. In these cases, use a cord protector/cover so that your kitten can't chew through the cord and injure herself.

Having a kitten is like having a baby — many household items can be dangerous. Small items like rubber bands and jewelry could be swallowed by a kitten. Make sure to keep the house tidy so that your kitten can't get into anything small enough to eat. Check to make sure that none of your household plants are poisonous to cats. Common examples of toxic plants include lilies and amaryllis. Keep the toilet lid down, don't use rodenticides or insect poison where your kitten could be exposed, and make sure all household cleaners are in a closed cabinet. Finally, keep the dryer and washer doors closed. Kittens are curious, and some even enjoy napping in a warm dryer. For obvious reasons, this could be very dangerous for your kitten.

## **Engage your kitten**

Keep your kitten entertained with toys that she can chase and toss around. Avoid toys with pieces that could be accidentally swallowed, like buttons or bells. Beware of yarn and loose strings — these are very dangerous if eaten. Like a child, a kitten needs to be actively engaged for both her body and her mind to properly develop.

Toys that she can toss around, like balls that are too large to swallow, will keep her entertained for hours! Cats have natural hunting tendencies, so toys that encourage stalking and pouncing will help her develop her muscles and satisfy her instincts. Many cats also like having a perch where they can watch birds and other animals outside.

At first, only spend short periods of time with your new kitten so that she has time to herself and isn't overwhelmed. As she becomes more comfortable in your home, increase the amount of your interaction. Spending time together could mean playing together, petting her, or even just being present in the same room as her. If your kitten becomes nervous, make sure to speak softly and gently and give her some time alone. Signs of nervousness include growling, hissing, twitching her tail and pulling her ears back.

## **Don't forget about your other pets**

It's easy to focus all of your attention on making sure your new kitten is happy and healthy. If you have other pets in the house, they may become jealous of the attention your kitten is getting, or stressed out by the addition of another animal in their home. Make sure to give all of your pets attention and ease any anxieties they may have.

Initial encounters between your new kitten and your other pets should be brief and supervised until they are used to each other. Always wait at least a couple days before you introduce your new kitten to any other pets. Let their sense of smell be the first method of introduction, as they sniff each other from each side of the kitten's safe room door. Introducing pets too quickly may lead to negative outcomes such as fear or aggression.

If you have a dog, keep him on a leash when he meets the kitten, and don't leave the two of them alone. Sometimes one pet may become hostile towards the other. If this occurs, separate the pets for a day or two and then try again. If the hostility continues, you may want to consult your veterinarian. Make sure to reward all of your pets when they interact calmly and happily with each other.