

# The Magical Journey of a Kitten's Life

If you find yourself lucky enough to care for the tiniest of kittens, you're in for an unforgettable experience. What's it like to pick up a one-week-old kitten? Have they even opened their eyes yet? Discover when a kitten's true personality emerges and when they're ready to come home with you.

**Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker**

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- In just eight weeks, kittens go through major developmental changes that take them from newborns, with eyes closed and ears folded, to fully weaned kitty
- At 1 week, kittens' eyes are closed and claws are non-retractable; they're about double their birth weight and will be very sleepy
- By 3 weeks, kittens begin to explore and walk around their environment. Some may even explore their litter box or show interest in toys
- With vision fully developed, and a sense of adventure emerging, 5-week-old kittens grow more independent each day, and their individual personalities may begin to show
- By weeks 7 and 8, kittens continue to transition into miniature versions of their adult selves and will run, jump and climb as much as possible

Bringing home a kitten is an exciting time, but blink and you just may wonder where your tiny kitten went — and a cat appeared in her place. In just eight weeks, kittens go through major developmental changes that take them from newborns, with eyes closed and ears folded, to fully weaned kitty.

If you're adopting a kitten, she won't be ready to find her forever home until at least 8 weeks, but you might be wondering about her development before then. Or, you may find yourself lucky enough to care for the tiniest of kitties during those first few weeks of life.

## Kittens Grow Rapidly From 1 to 6 Weeks

Weeks 1 through 6 are the period during which kittens grow and develop very rapidly. They'll be with their mother during this time, who's well-equipped to provide them with the warmth and food they need. Newborn kittens without a mom must be bottle-fed every two hours and stimulated to go to the bathroom.<sup>1</sup>

### 1 Week Old

Eyes are closed and claws are non-retractable. They're about double their birth weight and will be very sleepy. However, if you pick up a 1-week-old kitten, they'll hold up their head, move their limbs and make vocalizations.<sup>2</sup>

During this time, the mother cat knows she must keep her babies warm, nourish them and stimulate (lick) their bodies to encourage digestion and elimination. This is also a critical time for newborn kittens to receive antibody-containing colostrum, the first milk a mother cat produces. Hanna Shaw, also known as Kitten Lady, explains:<sup>3</sup>

*“During the first two days, a nursing mother may pass immunity to her kitten through colostrum, which will help the kitten fight illness. If a kitten does not receive the colostrum, she will be immune compromised and more vulnerable to disease and infection.”*

## 2 Weeks Old

At 2 weeks, kittens open their eyes, which will be blue. However, their eyesight isn't fully developed and they cannot see far away. Their ear canals are open, but their ears are rounded in shape, not pointy like a full-grown cat's.

Teeth haven't yet erupted and the claws are still non-retractable.<sup>4</sup> At this stage, kittens become aware of their littermates and begin to compete for mom's nipples at mealtime.

## 3 Weeks Old

By 3 weeks, kittens begin to explore and walk around their environment. Some may even explore their litter box or show interest in toys. Teeth begin to emerge and claws begin to retract. Eyes are still blue and ears begin to point upward.<sup>5</sup> At this point, your kitten may start to purr, and it's a good idea to begin short, gentle handling. According to Alley Cat Allies:<sup>6</sup>

*“If you are bottle feeding, you'll notice the kittens are drinking much more at each feeding, but at fewer feedings, probably four to five times a day. At this age you can start introducing solid food — use wet food at first, and try mixing it with kitten formula.”*

## 4 Weeks Old

By 4 weeks, kittens gain the confidence and coordination needed for more explorations. Their vision and hearing improve, and they can already use a litter box. Canine teeth also typically emerge in week four. Kittens at this age weigh about 1 pound and are typically curious about toys.<sup>7</sup> It's also a good time to start socialization.

“They are showing interest in the outside world, interacting with their littermates more and also beginning to interact with people and toys. That means it's time to begin socializing these kittens,” explains Alley Cat Allies.<sup>8</sup>

Kittens should be able to interact with other members of their own species (ideally littermates), as well as different types of people (adult males and females and children, for instance). Since most kittens are still nursing from their mom at this time, socialization begins at the breeder or rescue facility — and should continue after they're in their new home.

## 5 Weeks Old

By 5 weeks, kittens continue to develop their confidence and social skills. Their premolars begin to emerge and their ears become pointed. With vision fully developed, and a sense of adventure emerging, 5-week-old kittens grow more independent each day, and their individual personalities may begin to show.<sup>9</sup>

## 6 Weeks Old

At 6 weeks, your kitten's baby teeth are in and hearing is fully developed. Kittens at this age love to play, pounce and explore and may be eating mostly solid food — with some occasional snacks from mom.

## By 8 Weeks, Kittens Are Ready for Homes

By weeks 7 and 8, kittens continue to transition into miniature versions of their adult selves. Eye color will change from blue to their adult color and independence increases. Kittens also tend to start sleeping less around this age, which means energy — and playtime — increases. Expect 7- and 8-week-old kitties to run, jump and climb as much as possible.

By about week 8, all his very sharp baby teeth will be in and he'll be fully weaned within the next couple of weeks. By the end of week 9, kitty will weigh about 3 pounds. Cats are considered kittens until they're 6 months old — so your kitten still has a lot of growing up to do.

During weeks 8 to 15, be sure to provide wide-ranging socialization opportunities and even kitten kindergarten classes to help your kitty grow into a happy, well-adjusted cat. Better yet, consider adopting two kittens at the same time. Not only does this provide an regular companion and playmate for your cat, but it will support your cat's socialization and overall well-being during those first crucial weeks and beyond.

## Sources and References

<sup>1,2,4,5,7</sup> [PetMD, Kitten Development](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Kitten Lady, Determining a Kitten's Age](#)

<sup>6,8,9</sup> [Alley Cat Allies, How Old Is That Kitten?](#)

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