



19203 Aurora Avenue North
Shoreline, Washington 98133
www.catsexclusive.com

VETERINARY
C · E · N · T · E · R

(206) 546-2287
(206) 546-CATS
Fax (206) 546-5758

Developmental Periods in Cats*

NEONATAL: Birth to 2 weeks

Normal at this stage:

- Diet entirely mother's milk
- Minimal social interaction
- Elimination stimulated by mother
- Eyes open, walking by 14 days, can't regulate body temperature, can't groom self

To do's for caregivers:

- Provide high quality nutrition for queen
- Minimal but gentle handling of kittens
- Provide warm, safe environment
- If queen not present, will need to stimulate elimination with warm wash cloth

EARLY SOCIALIZATION: 3-8 weeks

Normal at this stage:

- Begins to eat solid food, gradually ceases milk consumption
- Sensitive period for social learning via siblings and mother. Social play begins and increases steadily. Learns many social skills from siblings, mother.
- Develops control of bladder and bowel function. Begins to use litter box.
- Object play begins and increases. Climbing, running begin. Capable of complex learning. Scratching and predatory behavior begin. Eye color changes. All baby teeth erupt. Can regulate body temperature. Begins to groom self.

To do's for caregivers:

- Provide high quality kitten food and fresh water daily.

- Frequent gentle handling and play with varied people including men, women, and supervised children. Expose to other cats and species while ensuring safety. Take kitten socialization classes if available. Reward appropriate friendly behavior to humans and all other animals.
- Provide litter boxes with low sides for easy entry. Scoop litter boxes twice daily. Use unscented litter.
- Enrich environment including toys. Kitten-proof home. (Exposed cords, plants, open trash cans, plastic bags, string, dental floss, etc.) Expose to novel objects and locations. Make the carrier a safe haven. Begin tooth brushing. Gently examine ears, teeth, nails. Groom. Provide scratching post. Begin training to sit, come, etc.
- First physical examination, deworming, FeLV/FIV test, and vaccines. Discuss behavior and nutrition with the veterinarian.
- Never use hands and feet to play with kittens. This teaches bad habits; always use toys.

LATE SOCIALIZATION: 9-16 WEEKS

Normal at this stage:

- Eating solid food
- Continues to learn social skills from siblings, mother. Social play peaks. Social conflict over status may emerge.
- Continues using litter box
- Vigorous exploration of environment and climbing. Begins to lose baby teeth.

To do's for caregivers:

- Continue social education. If had no previous social education, initiate slowly.
- May need larger litter box. (minimum box length is 1.5 X cat's body length.)
- Provide vertical space (e.g. climbing structures). Continue basic training.
- Serial physical examinations, vaccines. Discuss nutrition, behavior, spay or neuter.
- Kittens that have not had adequate social experience during early socialization may have poor social skills and require extra effort to acquire good social skills.

ADOLESCENCE: 17 weeks to 1 year

Normal at this stage:

- Sexual maturity if not neutered. Social play lessens. Likely to be subordinate to large adults but may challenge these cats for status.
- If allowed outdoor access, may wander farther and for longer periods than before.

To do's for caregivers:

- Start transition to high quality adult food at 8-10 months of age. Stop free-feeding and begin controlled portion-feeding to avoid overeating. Provide food puzzles and food toys.
- Continue to play with and reward friendly behavior. Contact veterinarian if serious conflicts arise.
- Reevaluate litter box size. Contact vet if spraying or inappropriate elimination occurs.
- Provide identification (e.g. microchip and break-away collar with tag), especially if cat goes outdoors.
- Spay or neuter if not already done.

ADULT: 1-6 years of age

Normal at this stage:

- Metabolic rate slows, may gain weight if diets and exercise not monitored.

- Matures socially at approximately 2-3 years, personality strongly affected by genetics and early experience, social play decreases but may continue given an available playmate

To do's for caregivers:

- Reassess body condition and food intake every 3 months. encourage exercise.
- Continue to play with and reward friendly behavior
- Reevaluate litter box size, contact vet if spraying or inappropriate elimination occurs.
- Rotate toys for self play, replace equipment and supplies such as beds and litter boxes as needed.
- Annual examination. Vaccines and testing as recommended by veterinarian. Behavior problems are best treated early. Obesity carries the same health risks as it does in humans. Depending on coat and body condition, extra grooming may be needed.

ADULT: 7 years and older

To do's for caregivers:

- Aging is not a disease. If your cat has changes in his/her appetite or activity level, contact your veterinarian
- Continue social interaction even if lower activity level is warranted
- Physical examination every 6 months, CBC, chemistry panel, UA, T4. Discuss behavior and nutrition.
- Interaction with younger cats may encourage activity, but extremely active young cat may be incompatible.