



# Developmental Stages in Cats

SOURCE: AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF FELINE PRACTITIONERS



KEY: **i** INGESTION **s** SOCIAL **e** ELIMINATION **o** OTHER

## NEONATAL: Birth–2 weeks

### Normal at this stage

- i** Diet entirely milk.
- s** Minimal social interaction.
- e** Stimulated by mother.
- o** Eyes open, walking by 14 days, can't regulate body temperature, can't groom self.

### To do's for caregivers

- i** Provide high quality nutrition for queen or kitten formula.
- s** Minimal but gentle handling.
- e** None unless ill or failure to thrive.
- o** Provide warm, safe environment.

## EARLY SOCIALIZATION: 3–8 weeks

### Normal at this stage

- i** Begins to eat solid food, gradually ceases milk consumption
- s** Sensitive period for social learning. Social play begins and increases steadily. Learns many social skills.
- e** Develops control of bladder and bowel function. Begins to use litter box.
- o** Object play begins and increases. Climbing and 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

- i** Provide high quality kitten food and fresh water daily.
- s** Frequent gentle handling and play with varied people including men, women, and supervised children. Expose to other cats/species while ensuring safety. Reward appropriate friendly behavior to humans and all other animals.
- e** Provide litter boxes with low sides for easy entry. Scoop litter boxes twice daily. Use unscented litter.
- o** Enrich environment including toys. Kitten-proof home. 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 harness and leash. Never use hands and feet to play with kittens. This teaches your kitten bad habits. Always use toys.



## LATE SOCIALIZATION: 9–16 weeks

### Normal at this stage

- i** Eating solid food.
- s** Continues to learn social skills. Social play peaks. Social conflict over status may emerge.
- e** Continues using litter box.
- o** Vigorous exploration of the environment and climbing, begins to lose baby teeth.

### To do's for caregivers

- i** No Change
- s** Continue social education. If had no previous social education, initiate slowly.
- e** May need larger litter box, (minimum box length 1.5 X cat's body length).
- o** Provide vertical space (e.g., climbing structures). Continue basic training.

## ADOLESCENCE: 17 weeks–1 year

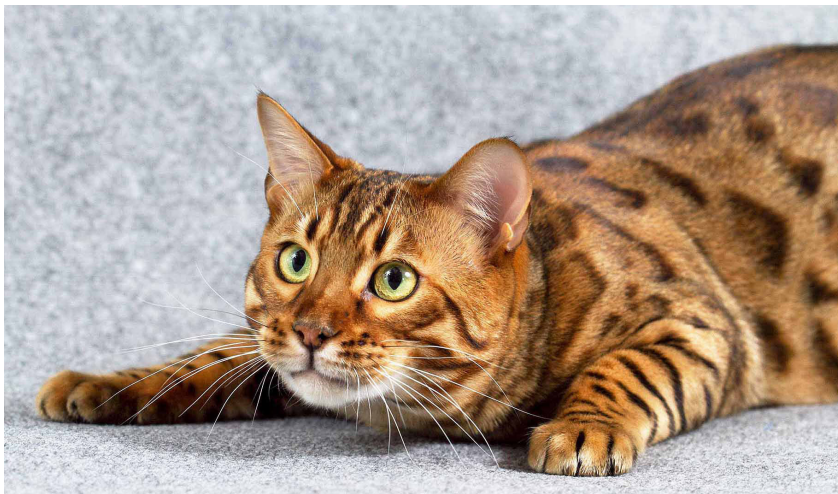
### Normal at this stage

- i** No change.
- s** Sexual maturity if not sterilized. Social play lessens. Likely to be subordinate to larger adults but may challenge these cats for status.
- e** Spraying may occur, less likely if spayed or neutered.
- o** If allowed outdoor access, may wander farther and for longer periods than before.

### To do's for caregivers

- i** Start transition to high quality adult food at 6-8 months of age. Provide food puzzles and food toys.
- s** Continue to play with and reward friendly behavior. Contact veterinarian if serious conflicts arise.
- e** Reevaluate litter box size. Contact vet if spraying or inappropriate elimination occurs.
- o** Provide identification (e.g., microchip or break-away collar and tag), especially if cat goes outdoors.

Spay or neuter if not previously done. If not spayed or neutered, your cat is more likely to urine mark in the house, get into fights, and roam long distances. Female cats that are not spayed can have unwanted kittens.



Annual examination. Vaccines and testing as recommended by veterinarian.

Behavior problems are best treated early. Contact your veterinarian if any behavior problems arise. 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

### Normal at this stage

- i** Changes in appetite can occur
- s** Decreased activity may lead to decreased social interaction

### To do's for caregivers

- i** Monitor appetite and water intake. Contact vet if increases or decreases.
- s** Continue social interaction—even if lower activity level is warranted
- e** Contact veterinarian if elimination concerns occur or persist

Physical examination every 6 months. CBC, chemistry panel, UA, T4 every 6-12 months. Discuss behavior and nutrition.

Interaction with younger cats may encourage activity, but extremely active young cats may be incompatible. Extra grooming may be needed, depending on body condition and coat. Medical problems increase with age and may present as behavior changes. Contact your veterinarian if changes occur.

## ADULT: 1–6 years

### Normal at this stage

- i** Metabolic rate slows, may gain weight if diet and exercise not monitored.
- s** 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.
- e** If intact male, urine odor becomes strong.
- o** Nothing

### To do's for caregivers

- i** Reassess body condition and food intake every 3 months, encourage exercise.
- s** Continue to play with and reward friendly behavior.
- e** Reevaluate litter box size, contact vet if spraying or inappropriate elimination occurs.
- o** Rotate toys for self play, replace equipment and supplies such as beds and litter boxes as needed.

THE AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY OF A CAT IS 12-15 YEARS. INDOOR ONLY CATS CAN LIVE AS LONG AS 21 YEARS.

Cat Years	Human Years
7	44
8	48
9	52
10	56
11	60
12	64
13	68
14	72
15	76
16	80
17	84