

# Selecting a New Kitten

- Take your time when deciding whether a kitten is right for you. The kitten you choose may be with you for 10 to 20 years or more.
- For best social development, a kitten should remain with its mother and/or littermates until 12 weeks of age.
- It can be tempting to adopt more than one or two kittens from a litter, so be careful not to agree to take home more kittens than you have time for and can afford.
- Don't be tempted to choose a kitten based on looks alone. Look for personality, too.
- Before you decide to adopt a kitten, your veterinarian should check the kitten's physical well-being.
- Adopting two kittens at the same time is often recommended so that they can continue to learn from each other and keep each other company.
- Before deciding to adopt a special-needs kitten, ask your veterinarian what you can expect in terms of the care required and the kitten's prognosis.
- If you get down on the floor, how do the kittens react to you? A well-socialized kitten should be comfortable with you and unafraid.
- Use something (other than your finger or hand) to entice the kittens to play. They should express an interest.
- After playtime, try to hold the kitten. He or she shouldn't hiss, bite, or scratch you. A little squirming is normal.
- Learn as much as possible about the kitten's history. Where and how a kitten is raised can greatly affect his or her temperament and behavior throughout life. For example, a kitten that has not been socialized to people by 7 weeks of age may have trouble bonding with them.

### Timing

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Kittens can leave their mother and littermates after they have been weaned, usually by 8 to 10 weeks of age. However, for best social development, a kitten should remain with its mother and/or littermates until 12 weeks of age. A kitten that is taken from its mother before weaning is complete may develop the troublesome behavior of sucking on nearby items or fingers.

### Looking for Personality

Don't be tempted to choose a kitten based on looks alone. Look for personality, too. Try to find a time when the kitten is active. Kittens are usually sleepy after eating. When watching kittens, note the following:

- Who is playful, confident, and friendly? A timid kitten might not be the best choice for a home with children who want to play with the kitten.

### The Physical

Before you adopt a kitten, you and your veterinarian should check the kitten's physical well-being. Many kittens have fleas, ear mites, and intestinal worms,

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so these problems shouldn't be a reason to reject a kitten. However, you should ask yourself whether you can afford a kitten's veterinary care. Be sure that you check the following:

- **Skin and haircoat**—Healthy kittens have soft fur with no bald spots. The skin shouldn't have scabs or rashes. Little black specks in the fur and on the skin may be flea dirt (excrement). This may be a sign of a flea infestation, which can be treated.
- **Body**—The kitten shouldn't feel fat or skinny. If you can feel the ribs, that's okay. However,

## Choices and Considerations

the ribs shouldn't be visible. If the belly is hard or swollen, the kitten might have worms.

- **Eyes**—The eyes should be free of discharge. The kitten shouldn't be squinting, and the eyes shouldn't be red. The third eyelid (a protective membrane that is normally folded into the inner corner of the eye) should not be prominent.
- **Ears**—The ears should look clean inside. Head shaking, scratching, and/or the presence of gritty brown or black debris may be a sign of ear mites, which can be treated.
- **Nose**—The kitten should not be sneezing or coughing frequently and should not have a runny nose. This could indicate a respiratory infection that is treatable but is contagious to other kittens and cats.
- **Mouth**—The teeth should be white. The gums should be pink but not red or pale. Ask what the kitten eats and whether his or her appetite is good. A kitten that is ready for adoption should be eating solid food. At first, try to feed the same food the kitten has been used to eating; a sudden diet change can cause stomach problems.
- **Rear end**—The kitten's anus and surrounding area should be clean—no signs of discharge or diarrhea.
- **Overall energy level**—Be wary if the kitten is constantly sleeping and does not seem playful or active. This could be a sign of illness.

Any new kitten or cat being introduced into the home should be examined by a veterinarian as soon

as possible and separated from all other household pets for a quarantine period of at least a few weeks. During that time, the new kitten should be tested for parasites and infectious diseases such as feline leukemia virus—especially if this testing was not performed before you obtained the pet. New cats or kittens should be observed closely for any signs of illness. Any problems should be reported to your veterinarian before introducing the new kitten to your other pets.

### Two May Be Better Than One

Adopting two kittens at the same time is often recommended so that they can continue to learn from each other and keep each other company. In addition, in terms of feline behavior, it's much easier to start with two kittens than to adopt a second cat later. Adult cats are territorial, so introducing another cat can be difficult.

It can be tempting to adopt more than one or two kittens from a litter, so be careful not to agree to take home more kittens than you have time for and can afford.

### Special-Needs Kittens

Not everyone is looking for a perfectly healthy kitten. People who have decided to adopt special-needs cats know that they can become very special companions. However, these cats may require a lot of care (which can be expensive) and may not live as long as healthy cats. Before deciding to adopt a special-needs kitten, ask your veterinarian what you can expect in terms of the care required and the kitten's prognosis.