

Kitten and Cat Development

Birth to 3 Weeks Old

Kittens are born toothless and with their eyes closed. They spend almost all of their time during their first week of life rooting, sucking and sleeping. Some kittens begin to open their eyes at around one week of age; most will have open eyes by two weeks of age. Generally, they will remain toothless during this time. Their activity will still be quite limited during this time. The deciduous (baby) teeth begin to erupt at around three weeks of age.

3 Weeks to 8 Weeks Old

The deciduous teeth continue to erupt through this time and the canine teeth (the fangs) make their pointy appearance. Kittens become more active and engaged in their environments but they are significantly uncoordinated. They also become devastatingly cute. Most kittens will have blue eyes until they are at least five weeks old. The baby teeth are fully erupted and individuals will be in full-on kitten mode. Coordination starts to improve. The eyes change to their adult color (unless the kitten is destined to be blue-eyed). Crucially the prime window for socialization begins to close; kittens that have their first human contact after eight weeks may be harder to socialize.

8 Weeks to 16 Weeks Old

This is prime kitten-hood. It is a period of significant growth play, and exploration. The deciduous teeth may appear to space out and be outgrown towards the end of this period. The deciduous teeth begin to fall out at around 16 weeks in most individuals, beginning at the front of the mouth and working symmetrically towards the back. The adult teeth begin to erupt to replace the kitten teeth.

16 Weeks to 18 Months

The adult teeth complete their eruption. Many kittens become more confident and assertive. Coordination improves significantly, and rapid growth occurs. This period is equivalent to adolescence in humans. Puberty occurs (5 to 6 months) in cats who have not been spayed or neutered. Cats reach their adult height and length and then fill out to their healthy adult weight.

18 Months to 3 Years Old

Young adulthood. These years are roughly equivalent to a human's 20's. Health is generally good, and minimal signs of aging are noted. However, some cats in this age range will develop dental calculus and gingivitis. Some cats also develop weight problems during this time.

3 Years to 7 Years Old

Prime adulthood. Health problems (other than dental disease and obesity related issues) are rare. Activity levels are still high. Cats remain agile and limber. However, most cats who don't benefit from dental care (tooth brushing or regular professional dental work) will develop significant dental disease during this time.

7 Years to 14 Years Old

This period is middle age for cats. While not exactly old, health problems such as kidney failure and hyperthyroidism may develop. The pupils of cats' eyes generally develop a slight blue or gray tinge at around seven years of age; this becomes more prominent as cats age but it does not significantly compromise vision or quality of life. The hair may become less supple. Dental disease will usually be pronounced in cats who have not received dental care. The bones become less flexible and signs of arthritis may develop.

14 Years and Beyond

Cats are now senior citizens and aging processes that began in middle age progress. Dental disease may become profound and teeth may fall out. The pupils of the eyes will have a significant gray tinge. Mobility becomes compromised, activity decreases, hair may become matted, bones will be brittle and the ribs firm, the voice may be raspy or hoarse, and there may be evidence of hearing or vision loss. Age related illnesses like kidney failure and cancer become common.