

the kittens are born...

The kittens are blind, deaf and weak; they can crawl only a few inches at a time. Their only desires are for food and warmth. When mom leaves the nest, they will cry, sounding like a chorus of tiny trumpets.

This is a close-up of five-day-old kittens. Aren't they sweet little guys? As you can see, their ears are still flattened to their heads.



then the eyes open...

Shorthair kittens begin to open their eyes at 5-8 days.

Longhair kittens do not open their eyes until 10-14 days. Isn't that strange? So if some of your kittens don't have their eyes open yet, but the others do, it may be because they are longhaired. All kittens' eyes are beautiful deep orbs of blue at first. They will look like this until the kittens are three weeks old. Then the iris and pupil will form and the kitten's permanent eye colors will slowly emerge. At first, although the eyes are open, the kittens are still almost completely blind.

Kitten Development

at three weeks, the ears will be completely erect...

and they can hear a little bit, but they do not orientate to sound yet. They also will have the newly-found ability to purr.

Their baby teeth are starting to come in, which will make the mother cat increasingly more reluctant to feed them. Weaning should begin at four weeks of age.



and they will try to stand...

on short, shaky little legs. See how the tail is still short and stiff? It will become longer and flexible when the kitten is four or five weeks old. You will also notice that their heads are disproportionately large, their torsos are very short and their legs are stumpy, especially their front legs. This adds to their clumsiness.



a few days later, they begin to wobble-walk...

at twenty-five days, they will be walking on all four legs, but they aren't coordinated yet. They will also orientate to sights and sounds. They will wobble and fall over for no apparent reason. They will escape the nesting box and wreak havoc on your house.

using the litterbox...

will occur around four to seven weeks of age. At first, they will just play in the litterbox, doing everything but going potty. The kittens may have some accidents. Eventually they will make the connection.

It is advisable to avoid using clumping cat litter with kittens until they are four months of age. The problem is that sometimes, kittens consume too much of the litter, and this can cause serious health problems. Litter labeled "scoopable" is okay, but avoid the clumping.



weaning to solid food...

will also occur at four to seven weeks of age. They will stand in their food (as demonstrated here by Looie) and track it on the floor, making a big mess! Start leaving a shallow dish of water on the ground for them as well, starting at three weeks of age.

It is best to let the kittens stay with their mother until ten to twelve weeks of age.



Special thanks to Heather, for collaborating with me on the website and supplying me with pictures of her beautiful kittens for this site (this is chyna and annika). Heather foster cares for homeless mother cats and their kittens, as well as sick adult cats, so that they can receive the care and attention they need. Heather loves fostering—maybe you will too! Here is her website (with more wonderful pictures of the kittens for which she has cared):