

Tips For Giving Treats To Your Young Cat

Don't be afraid to let your maturing kitty explore a variety of tastes and textures.

Written by [Rose Gordon Sala](#), November, 2014



Give your young cat treats in moderation. *BackyardProduction/iStock/Thinkstock*

Kittens grow into their stronger, more agile feline adult bodies around 12 months of age, and they mature emotionally around 18 months or two years of age. During this time, you may witness a complete transformation of your little kitten's personality and form. A great way to stay connected with your growing kitty during this rapid developmental period is to offer him treats.

"If you can make 'treating' a part of your bonding ritual, it's a good thing," says Kathryn Primm, DVM, who runs [Applebrook Animal Hospital](#) in Ooltewah, Tennessee. "It makes everyone happy. And it increases your role as the provider and somebody who can't be lived without."

Just don't go overboard. Treats should generally make up less than 10 percent of the calories a cat consumes each day, especially in growing cats who are developing their adult teeth and bones, not to mention healthy eating habits, says Primm, author of *Tennessee Tails: Pets and Their People*.

This is also a time when cats can begin to pack on unhealthy pounds if we let them get carried away. Their metabolism may have slowed down, along with their general growth rate, as they reach their full size around a year old.

"It's really important to have your vet determine if your cat is overweight, on the thin side or normal weight," so you'll know how best to treat him, as well as where to adjust his regular diet, explains Cindy Houlihan, DVM, owner of [The Cat Practice](#) in Birmingham, Michigan.

"We want to reward them and love them, but we want to be careful not to overdo it with treats, because more than half of cats are overweight, making them more at risk for heart disease, diabetes and all sorts of diseases," she says.

So go ahead and combine your young cat's treat with a little exercise. It will benefit his waistline, your bond and just generally entertain you both, says Houlihan, who advises turning treats into a game.

"Cats like to hunt for their food, so you can mimic that by hiding some of their food around the house, which can cause them to be more active," she says. "Place dry food around an activity center so they have to work for it. It stimulates them, which is important. You don't want them to sleep all day."

Treat Types

Primm likes to carry bite-size freeze-dried fish and chicken treats in her pocket to exams to ease her clients' stress. She also suggests trying some of the soft-centered treats with crunchy bits on the outside for cats who prefer a different texture.

Houlihan recommends low-carb, high-protein treats.

"Cats are true carnivores and people tend to forget that," she says.

Her own cats like hard, heart-shaped dehydrated haddock treats that are only one calorie apiece.

Food allergies can also start around a cat's adolescence. They might show up in the form of skin conditions like scabs around the ears, a seemingly fat bottom lip or simply chronic vomiting, Houlihan points out. That might mean looking for specially formulated hypoallergenic treats, or just those with a new meat source they haven't tried yet, such as rabbit or venison.

Treats that can aid your cat's dental health are another great option. They come in all sorts of flavors to tempt your cat these days, including salmon, beef, chicken and even catnip. Just remember that while they can help, dental treats aren't designed to replace regular dental care, Houlihan says.

"Seventy percent of cats have dental disease by 3 years of age, so it's a big issue," she says.

Look for dental treats that display a **Veterinary Oral Health Council** (VOHC) seal to ensure it meets veterinary standards for reducing plaque and tartar, she adds.

Try, Try Again

Adolescence is the "prime age to learn things, to set patterns for whether or not they're going to be obese or be couch potatoes or like to play," Primm says. That makes it a great time to experiment with treats and accustom your kitty to different flavors and textures.

"They're not quite as set in their ways when they're young," she says. "You can establish a lot of really positive things when they're young."

This might help to ensure a less picky adult cat eater or even establish good behaviors. For example, you can offer a favorite treat whenever applying flea medication to reward and encourage a (hopefully!) calm demeanor in your kitty.

First, though, you'll need to find that special treat. Hopefully, we've given you a few ideas, but don't be afraid to experiment a bit, while avoiding those foods toxic to cats (grapes, raisins, chocolate, alcohol, onions and garlic). After all, cats are notoriously opinionated and choosy. But that's why we adore them, right?

A friend of mine had a black-and-white domestic shorthaired cat whose favorite treats were cantaloupe and the occasional Cheez-It! She didn't have access to those types of treats often, my friend says, but she did manage to live until the ancient age of 19, so they must have been doing something right.

"Just keep trying different things until you find one that they can't resist," Primm says.

Original link: http://petcha.com/pet_care/tips-for-giving-treats-to-your-young-cat/