

Choosing between a kitten and an adult

Cute, cuddly kittens are hard to resist. But an older cat may need a home more desperately—and may be a better fit for your lifestyle. Consider these factors before you make your final choice.



Pros and cons of kittens

Kittens less than 4 months old tend to climb rather than jump on objects, which can mean shredded curtains, scratched dressers, and worse if they climb up your leg! Their energy and inquisitiveness also can lead them into awkward and sometimes dangerous situations. For example, a kitten may climb your curtains and get stuck, or chew electrical cords.

> Be sure to weigh your time constraints as you make your decision. If your little one doesn't get enough exercise and attention during the day, she'll probably romp across your face or nibble on your toes at night while you're trying to sleep.

> If you want a cat who enjoys your kids' company, a kitten may be a better choice than an adult cat. If she grows up with their antics, she's less likely to run away or hide when your children get rambunctious. And if you already have adult cats at home, they'll often accept a kitten more readily than they will an adult cat.

> Another advantage to kittens is that they're easier to train. For example, you can make a scratching post part of the routine from the beginning. They also learn to tolerate nail trims, baths, and teeth brushing more readily than adults.

> One more piece of advice: Don't adopt a kitten who's less than 8 weeks old. Kittens need time to grow and learn with their littermates, and this socialization time will make your kitten's transition to your house that much easier.

Pros and cons of adult cats

One benefit of adult cats: Their temperament is pretty set, so you can judge how well a potential pet will interact with other pets, your children, and you. Ask yourself if she seems friendly or aloof, high-energy or calm, temperamental or tolerant, and match these characteristics with those of your family and any other pets to decide if she'd be a good fit.

> A disadvantage of a set temperament is that it will be hard to modify any undesirable behaviors—starting with a kitten gives you a better chance at shaping her behavior to suit your needs.

> Mature cats tolerate being alone better than kittens, so if you work long hours or travel often, consider a mature cat who won't require as much training and monitoring. Of course, all cats need regular care and attention. If you're not sure you can meet a cat's needs, err on the safe side and pick a lower-maintenance pet like a bird or a fish.

> If you decide to adopt an adult cat, check out your local shelters. Most shelter cats are adults who desperately need your companionship and a loving home.

There's no right answer when you're choosing between a cat and a kitten. Just analyze your situation and choose what's best for you!