

Cat Grooming

How Do I Trim My New Kitten's Nails?

[Kittens](#) are seemingly inexhaustible, furry, bundles of energy: running at warp speed through your home chasing after every real or imaginary stimulus and pouncing on anything they see. Even before they are mature enough to 'leap tall buildings in a single bound,' thanks to their claws, they can still manage to climb, claw and snag their way up almost any surface (your leg included). In addition, cats just innately scratch things – not just to be mean, points out [Cornell University](#), or destructive, but as a [grooming](#) behavior (to remove loose bits of nail) and to mark territory (via scent glands on their feet). That means that most cat guardians realize pretty quickly that somebody is going to have to keep those little talons trimmed back in order to protect everything and everyone else in the household. So how do you get your adorable little, whirling dervish to sit still long enough to have her nails trimmed and how do you trim them without causing either of you undue stress or pain?

Acclimate your kitten before you cut nails

Ideally, you should be getting your kitten accustomed to certain kinds of handling before there is even a need for it. Every day you should be looking in her [ears](#), checking her [teeth](#), opening her mouth like you are giving her imaginary pills, and handling her feet and nails. Basically, you should hold each paw and then each individual toe/toenail giving your kitten positive reinforcement (either verbally or with tiny bits of treats) for being tolerant of the manipulations without actually trying to cut her nails. Since cats can retract and extend their claws you will also need to become comfortable pushing up on the last bit of toe (sort of lightly pinch it top to bottom) in order to extend the nail out to its full length.

Observe your kitten's nails before you cut them

While you are getting your kitten used to having her feet and nails handled, look at the anatomy of her toenails. The claws or nails tend to grow out straight/horizontally at first and then naturally curve down toward the ground and taper toward a point. Luckily cats tend to have clear/white nails, so you should be able to see the pink area or "quick" at the base/beginning of the nail where the blood supply is. You will want to cut beyond that point to avoid discomfort or [bleeding](#).

Have your tools ready before you cut your kitten's nails

There are generally two types of pet nail clippers:

- The guillotine type with a circle at the end that encloses the nail and a blade that moves into the circle to cut the nail tip.
- A scissor type that cuts from two sides coming together

It is personal preference which you prefer to use. However, both types of clippers can seem awfully big and can make it difficult to actually see the nail when cutting a cat's nails, let alone a kitten's. You may find that using your own compound lever type nail trimmer may be much easier for you to use since you are accustomed to using it in the first place and because it will allow you to more clearly see exactly where you are going to cut the nail.

You will also want to have some type of *styptic powder*, *quick stop* or *clotting agent* available in case you do cut a nail too short and cause bleeding. *[Editor's Note: Ask your veterinarian for a recommendation.]* This is pretty unlikely to happen with cat's nails but if somebody startles or jumps, accidents do happen.

Start small when you cut your kitten's nails

Once you and your kitten are used to feet and toes being handled, try cutting a couple of nails. You don't have to do all of them in one sitting. Play with a few. And then cut a couple while giving the same verbal or [food](#) rewards and encouragement as before. Trim as many as you both feel comfortable with but don't push it. Take a break if you need to and come back to it later. You'll have a lifetime of nail trimming ahead of you, so take your time.

Don't panic if your kitten protests

Little kids cry when they get a haircut. That doesn't mean their hair hurts. So if your kitten whines or squirms when you are cutting her nails, that doesn't mean you've hurt her. Just that she's anxious about the process and the strange pressure on her nails. Can you hurt her if you cut the nail too short? Sure. Will she bleed? Yes. Will she survive? Absolutely. *[Editor's Note: If you do have any concerns about cutting too much or a bleed that won't stop, contact your veterinarian right away.]*

Tips for cutting kitten nails

- Your cat doesn't just have four toes. Don't forget to trim the nails on her 'thumbs' or dewclaws. In addition, some 'polydactyl' cats have more toes than average, and those extra

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toes can be small and hard to spot--especially in shaggy, long-haired cats. So be thorough and be sure you get them all.

- You can also file any rough areas of the cut surface of the nail smoother with an emery board, but you'll want to gradually get your kitten accustomed to how that feels too just like you do with the cutting itself.

Most importantly, don't rush. Take your time and let both your kitten and you get used to the process.

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian -- they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.