

Kitten Care

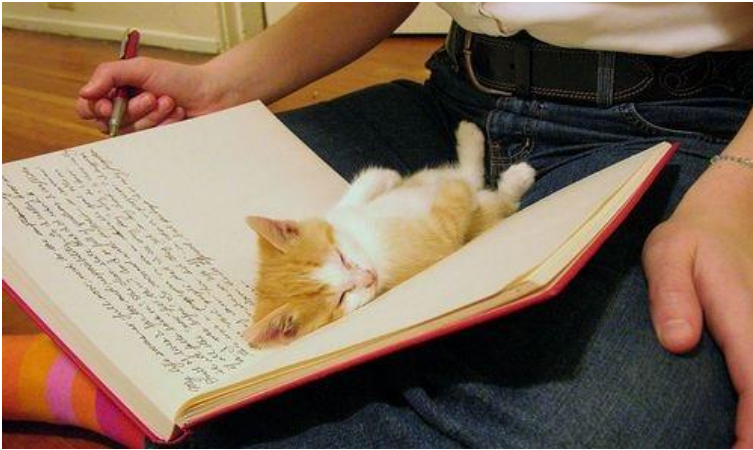
0 - 8 Weeks



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Keeping Records



One of the most important aspects of caring for a kitten is keeping good records.

You will want to chart the kitten's initial weight, take notes on the kitten's general appearance, and accurately chart the feeding schedule with the time and amount of formula fed.

I suggest you weigh the kitten at the same time daily and chart this as well.

The more detailed your notes, the more information you will have available to you for decisions you may have to make regarding a kitten's health. These can also help you see a problem before it is a major emergency.

What to do first:

As soon as you take possession of the kitten you should:

- 1) Check the kitten out and make an estimate of it's age if this information was not provided to you (shelter estimates are not always correct.)
- 2) Check the kitten's hydration and overall health- check the color of it's gums, it's temperature, it's weight, etc. If something isn't right, seek advice.
- 3) Try to feed the kitten. Remember that if this is the kitten's first time eating from a bottle or syringe, it will have to adjust because it is used to Mom.
- 4) Help the kitten go to the bathroom. Check poop and pee for any thing concerning. If the kitten has not eaten in awhile it may not poop, but should pee after it's first feeding.
- 5) Check for fleas and clean the kitten up if necessary.
- 6) Make sure the kitten is warm enough and if everything else looks good, put the kitten in it's nest so it can get some rest
- 7) Make notes of the kitten's weight, temperature, how much it ate, and it's overall health. Don't assume you will remember these things later on if you don't write them down! Make note of the day you got the kitten, how old you think it is, and any information you have on it's background.



Mother cats rarely abandon their kittens! If you or someone you know stumbles upon a litter of kittens, please walk away and watch from a distance. Mom is likely either frightened of you or out hunting. Unless the kittens are in a dangerous situation (in the road, in pouring rain/ an area that may flood, etc.) do not move them... Mom will likely return! A humane trap can be purchased, rented, or borrowed and the mother can be trapped and relocated with her litter. Feral baby kittens are VERY easy to socialize! The younger they are, the easier it is! The BEST chance for a kitten's survival is with Mom!

Should You Take These Kittens In?

Mom is always best! Is there a foster mom available? Anywhere?

GO TO THE VET!

When to seek more care for your foster kitten.

A kitten can go downhill very quickly!

Diarrhea - liquid/uncontrollable (very dangerous in tiny kittens) (see poop guide- pages 28-29 & diarrhea- pages 40-41)

Dehydration—Tent test shows very dehydrated (see tent test - page 40)

Bad coloring— white/pale gums or dark red, dry or tacky gums

Breathing difficulty

Refusal to eat; multiple missed feedings

Lethargic/Limp/collapsed

Low body temperature (do NOT attempt to warm the kitten quickly! Kitten should be warmed over several hours, slowly. Do NOT attempt to feed a cold kitten!) (See correct temp guide- page 38)

Kitten Development

Newborn kittens: Eyes shut, ears flat to head, skin looks pinkish. Part of umbilical cord may still be attached.



1 week old: Eyes beginning to open, ears still flat.



2 weeks old: Eyes open, begin to crawl around.



3 weeks old: Eyes are fully open, ears are erect, and teeth are visible. Kittens this age are just starting to walk and will be very wobbly



4 weeks old:



5 weeks old:



6 weeks old:



7 weeks old:



8 weeks old:



Birth to 2 weeks

For the first week of life, the kitten's main activities include eating and sleeping. The eyes and ears are still closed at this point but he can crawl a little. The remnants of the umbilical cord will fall off around 3 days old. After it falls off, monitor the area carefully for infection (swelling, redness, or discharge.) Kittens under 10 days old cannot regulate their own body temperature so they must be kept warm to avoid chilling. They will develop the shiver reflex after about 10 days and will be able to better regulate themselves. Between 5 and 10 days of age, the eyes and ears will begin to open (interesting fact – all kittens eyes are blue, they will change to their permanent color later). Keep the kitten out of bright light and away from loud sounds.

2 to 3 weeks

The kitten should be able to see and hear everything around him now. His vocal range will start to develop as well (mewling, hissing and purring). He will start to explore his area by walking short distances so be sure he cannot fall. The kitten will start to eliminate on his own now (but assistance may still be needed!) He will begin teething, and his eyes will start changing to their permanent color. The socialization window is now open so begin introducing him to other people and animals.

4 to 5 weeks

Kittens have pretty much mastered walking and will start running in short bursts. They are also developing basic instinctual responses such as arching the back when startled. The meow will become more pronounced. It's also time to start litter training the kitten. Use a shallow container with low sides and a small amount of non-clumping litter. The cardboard trays baby food jars or canned cat food jars come in on grocery store shelves are great baby kitten litter boxes! Kittens usually learn how to dig, squat, and bury by watching their mothers do it, but now you must point him in the right direction. Set him in the box and use one of his front paws to gently dig in the litter. The kitten may not cover his waste at first, but some cats never learn to do this. Also, it's time to start weaning the little guy onto semi-solid food. Kittens can receive their first distemper shot at 4 weeks old.

6 to 7 weeks

The kitten should be completely weaning and eating from a bowl by 7 weeks old. He will be running and playing well now. He will also start to learn basic hunting and stalking moves, especially if he has another cat to play with. Toys start to become very fun – but avoid any string, yarn, or small pieces that the kitten may swallow. Remember, kittens are very curious and will use their mouths to explore new objects, just like human babies. Continue socializing the kitten by carrying him around, turning him over on his back, grooming him, talking to him or petting him while he's eating, and examining his ears, mouth, and under his tail. The more different situations he is exposed to now will increase his ability to cope with new things later on.

8 weeks

If you aren't planning on keeping the kitten, it can be placed in a new home now. Kittens reared by their mothers should stay with her until 10-12 weeks of age, but hand-raised kittens can go between 8-9 weeks. As long as the kitten is 2lbs and 8 weeks old, it can be spayed/neutered.

Socialization

Socializing a kitten is a very important part of fostering. Well-socialized kittens make much better companions.

Newborn to four week old kittens should be handled daily by the foster parent, but only for a short period of time. Kittens this age tire very easily and need their rest. From five weeks of age and on, it is better to have multiple people handle the kittens. Old, young, male, female, expose them to everything!

Never use your hands as play toys and discourage kittens from biting and scratching. If they become rough, stop playing immediately and ignore them for a few minutes. If they are playing inappropriately, redirect their play to toys. NEVER hit or spank a kitten. This just teaches them to fear human hands. ALWAYS supervise closely when kittens are handled by children.

Play with your kittens. Use kitty teasers and dangle toys. Also, keep toys in the cage or room so kittens will be able to play when you are busy. It is a good idea to offer them a scratching post at this early age as well.

Give your kittens as much attention as possible. Kittens who are caged too long or not handled regularly can develop psychological problems.

Basic Supplies

Before taking on baby kittens, you need to have some basic supplies.

A carrier, crate, or cage: Very young kittens do well in a cat or dog carrier- the plastic kind that you transport pets to the vet in. Cages with small bar spacing (1/2 inch or smaller) also work well, but will need to be covered in a blanket. Beware of dog crates! The 1" - 2" bar spacing is really dangerous to young kittens! They may be able to squeeze through the bars completely and escape- or even worse, they may attempt to do so and end up hanging themselves from the side or top of the crate!

Blankets: Baby blankets or fleece work really well. Beware of towels or any other fabric with loops as their little nails can get stuck! You will need *a lot* of bedding- and plan on doing laundry daily. Kittens are messy and need to be kept clean!

Heat source: Unless the room is over 85 degrees, a heat source is needed! (ALWAYS give the kitten a place to get away from the heat source— do not place a heating pad over the entire bottom of the habitat!) A heating pad works well. So does a rice warmer. I prefer the cheap Conair heating pads that are \$12 at Dollar General over the more expensive models. This version has a simple on/off switch- it will stay on indefinitely until turned off. Using the more expensive models with auto shut off can leave your kittens freezing when you think they are nice and warm! I have left these Conair heating

pads on for weeks at a time with no issues. ***Warning! Always have SEVERAL layers of blankets (at least a few inches thick!) between the heating pad and the kittens! They need warmth but not too much!***

Paper towels, tissues, wash cloths: Kittens under 4 weeks old cannot urinate or defecate without stimulation. This is something their mother provides for them, so when you are raising kittens this young, you will be responsible for this! You will need soft towels or tissue to stimulate them to use the bathroom. **Do not use baby wipes– the alcohol will dry out their little kitten parts!**

Kitten Formula: I prefer the powdered formula over the canned/already made formula. It is much more cost effective! As far as brands go, KMR and PetLac are great brands. These are available at places like Tractor Supply, Petco, PetSmart, and independent pet stores. For the best prices, buy online. Amazon sells the 10.5oz can of PetLac for less than \$10. GNC brand (available at PetSmart) is also ok. ***Do not use Hartz brand (available at Walmart) - many horror stories online about this stuff killing kittens. Do not use cow's milk! Some people have great luck with goat's milk, as well as other recipes you can find online. I prefer the powdered kitten-specific formula because it is specially formulated for kittens***

Nursing bottles or syringes; nipples: I prefer to use syringes. You can purchase syringes at Tractor Supply or online (Amazon, eBay, etc) The bottle kits you can purchase at pet stores (and Walmart!) come with a variety of nipples. These nipples fit perfectly on the end of a luer lock syringe! I have found that feeding with a syringe with nipple is much easier than using a bottle, they are also

sterile and easier to control. You can see exactly how much the kitten is eating and control the flow of the formula easily. Syringes can be thoroughly cleaned (you can boil them!) or used once and disposed. Nipples need to be boiled or cleaned very well after each use. It is very important to use only sterile supplies when feeding your kittens!

Kitchen or Postal Scale: One of the easiest ways to measure how good of a job you are doing with kittens is by a daily weigh in. A kitten that is not gaining weight is not a healthy kitten. A kitten that is losing weight is a very sick kitten. Weight should be taken daily and charted along with other notes. Any type of scale that measures in ounces or grams is sufficient. Kitchen scales are usually less expensive than postal scales and can be purchased for under \$10 at Walmart!

Karo Syrup: Karo can save a life. It can be purchased at any grocery store or dollar store for around \$2. Hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) is frequently the cause of death in kittens. This can be caused by many things: infrequent feedings, not feeding enough at feedings, digestive or other internal issues, anemia, feeding a food that is not nutritionally right for kittens, etc. A few drops of Karo on the way to the vet can keep a kitten from crashing.

Pedialyte: When dehydration is an issue, Pedialyte can save a kitten's life. The clear unflavored kind should be kept on hand. Many stores have a private label brand of unflavored rehydration fluid which is also fine to use and is usually cheaper. **Pedialyte MUST be thrown away or frozen 48 hours after you open the bottle!!

Cat litter: (start litter training at around 4 weeks) Any non-clumping variety of litter will be fine. The clumping litter can be dangerous if ingested by a kitten- and may get stuck in their paws where it will become very difficult to remove.

Thermometer: A thermometer can be helpful when evaluating a kitten's health. A kitten with a low body temperature can be very close to death. A digital thermometer works best and should be dipped in Vaseline prior to use.

Flea comb, Dawn, Flea prevention: Kittens can die from a flea infestation. Flea Anemia is a serious issue. If you see fleas on a kitten, then the whole litter has fleas and all need to be treated. A bath with Dawn regular "original" blue dish detergent will kill fleas. You must be VERY CAREFUL when bathing a kitten– the water MUST be warm (but not hot!) and the room must be VERY warm. You must towel dry/use a hair dryer with diffuser or set on low to dry the kitten immediately after the bath. Leaving a wet kitten in a carrier could be a death sentence. KITTENS CANNOT REGULATE THEIR OWN BODY TEMPRATURE!! A quick bath with dawn while running the flea comb through the kitten's fur will eliminate fleas on the kitten. A topical flea medication can be used in VERY SMALL DOSES. Revolution is safe for young kittens. It should be dosed carefully. Most over the counter flea medication, especially the inexpensive ones sold at grocery stores are NOT safe to use on kittens. Please do not poison a kitten with flea medication that is unsafe! Flea shampoo, collars, etc. should NEVER be used. Make sure all bedding & housing is cleaned or disposed of if fleas are present.

Feeding

Kitten Feeding Schedule

Birth-1 week	Every 3 hours	8 times per day
1-3 weeks	Every 4 hours	6 times per day
3-4 weeks	Every 5 hours	5 times per day
4-5 weeks	Every 5-6 hours	4-5 times per day

Daily Feeding Requirements

Birth—1 week	24 mL per day
1 week	32 mL per day
2 weeks	54 mL per day
3 weeks	80 mL per day
4 weeks	104 mL per day
5 weeks	128 mL per day
6 weeks+	Eating on it's own, supplement if needed

For example, a 2 day old kitten requires 24mL of formula divided into 8 feedings, equaling 3mL per feeding ($24 / 8 = 3$). In general, the kitten will need about 8mL per ounce of body weight per day.

Kitten formula should be carefully warmed up to about 95 -100° F before feeding. Never feed a kitten who is hypothermic and is less than 95° F - can cause aspiration pneumonia and be fatal. Some kittens will only eat formula that is warmed to around 100° - so if kitten isn't eating-temp your formula!!

How to Feed

Important: Position the kitten properly. Raising his head may cause aspiration (inhalation of formula into lungs), which could be fatal. Kitten should be feet down/head straight (picture him nursing on mom). **Never feed a kitten on his back like a human baby.** Never hold the kitten in the air while feeding. Kitten should be manipulating the suction. **Do not squeeze or force formula into his mouth - EVER.**

Correct way:



Correct way to feed with a bottle:



Bottle Feeding

Baby bottles can be bought which are specially designed for kittens. The size of the hole in the nipple is critical. If when the bottle is turned upside down the milk drips from the nipple, the hole is too large, and you risk drowning the kitten. If when the bottle is turned upside down the milk only comes out after considerable squeezing of the bottle, the hole is too small, and its use may result in the kitten becoming discouraged and refusing to nurse.

The correct size hole allows the milk to drip from the nipple with minimal squeezing of the bottle. As nipples are used the holes tend to enlarge, so new ones must be introduced. Kittens tend to become fixated upon one particular nipple, so when changing from an old one to a new one they may show reluctance to feed. As the kittens grow the size of the hole in the nipple can be gradually enlarged.

Syringe Feeding

Syringe feeding is very similar to bottle feeding. You can use a luer lock syringe which will fit a nipple on the end very easily. For very young kittens you can use a slip tip syringe with no nipple on the end. Make sure when syringe feeding that you never force formula into the kitten. The kitten should be able to suck formula from the syringe easily, or you can very slowly drop formula into the kitten's mouth. A 1ml syringe is great for very young kittens and you can increase the size of the syringe to 3ml, 6ml, 10ml, etc. as the kitten grows and is able to eat more at each feeding. Syringes can be used one time and thrown away or sterilized and used multiple times.



Burping

Kittens can be burped after every feeding.

Hold the kitten upright against your shoulder or place one hand under his belly and gently pat and rub his back.

Weaning

You should start weaning a bottle fed kitten at around 4 weeks. Some kittens will wean almost immediately, while others will take a few weeks. You can start by thickening the formula you are feeding them with some baby food rice cereal & baby food chicken (make sure it does not have garlic or onion added! Just chicken!). Try offering it to them on a spoon or in a saucer. Do not assume that because there is food available to them that they will eat it – make sure each kitten is eating enough and supplement with bottle/syringe feedings as needed! If you are not SURE the kitten is eating, you can weigh them before and after feeding. Sometimes they just push it around or make a mess, but do not actually consume the food!

Sometimes kittens have a hard time learning to eat from a bowl. You can try taking a bowl and turning it upside down on a slightly larger plate. Pour the gruel/thickened formula mixture over the bottom of the bowl so it flows down the sides and on to the plate. This way the kitten can lean up to eat instead of having to lean down into a bowl.

Be careful when offering canned food to baby kittens. Always use a poultry or beef flavor– never a seafood flavor. Canned food should be mixed with formula when first introduced because it can be too rich for their systems, leading to diarrhea or digestive issues. Always use a canned food labeled for kittens because they have different nutritional requirements than adult cats. Some kittens are harder to wean & may need to be supplemented with bottle/syringe feedings up until 8 weeks.

Always make sure you are monitoring a kitten's intake throughout the entire weaning process. Kittens can be offered dry food and a saucer of water at around 4 weeks.

Royal Canin makes a dry food for kittens called BabyCat. It has very tiny pieces that can be eaten by tiny little kittens. Sometimes it is hard to find and you may need to use another brand of kitten food. If you find the pieces are too big, you can break them up before offering them to the kittens (try a sandwich bag and a hammer). Some kittens like bigger pieces and will spend a few minutes chewing & playing with them.

If you decide to moisten dry food then whatever they do not eat after 30 minutes or so needs to be thrown away. Dry food that has been moistened can grow bacteria and should never be left out to be eaten.



Changes in food can cause the kitten to get diarrhea, & this can be life threatening to a young kitten. Minor diarrhea can be normal with the food changes. Watch the stools to make sure they go back to normal quickly; if not, call the vet or seek assistance.

Elimination

Kittens should be peeing every time after you feed them. If no urine is produced after 12 hours, take them to the veterinarian immediately.

Normal kitten poop is mustard or brown colored, firm, and formed in tiny little logs, but still a bit squishy, especially as a newborn. Green or yellow watery stool usually means overfeeding.

Kittens usually poop about once a day. Each kitten is different though, so that may vary. If a kitten has not eliminated in 2 days and is too young to try gruel mixed with a little canned pumpkin (100% pure pumpkin– NOT pie filling!) then they need to see a vet or can be given an enema or a suppository (will need to be done at the direction of a vet or an experienced caretaker.) If they are 3+ weeks old then you can try adding a spoonful of pumpkin to their food.



It is VERY common for newly orphaned kittens to have a hard time adjusting to formula when first being bottle/syringe fed. This may result in several days with no poop. Monitor the kitten's stomach- if hard or distended, the kitten needs assistance and you should seek advice or a vet ASAP!

How to Stimulate a Kitten for Elimination

Immediately after feeding:

Turn on side (or back) and stimulate the genitals.

Rub in one direction like mom would.

Do not rub back and forth- friction is irritating.

Keep going until all urination stops (this means the bladder is empty).

Kitten will not keep peeing when you stop rubbing, so continue until bladder is empty (nothing comes out).

It can take a few minutes for a kitten to poop when you are stimulating them.

Sometimes they will cry or meow while pooping—this is normal.

You can use a washcloth, paper towel, or if neither of those are working, you may need to use your fingers. If using cloth or paper towels, make sure they are damp and warm. Do not use cotton balls as they can shed and get fibers all over the kitten.



Poop & Pee Guide

Poop Color

Bloody - Actual red blood seen in stool. Could indicate Panleukopenia. Grossly abnormal, must be seen ASAP.

Mucous - yellowish/white/clear slimy substance. Indicates severe bowel irritation. Grossly abnormal and needs immediate care.

Black - True dark black color to stool. Usually indicates bleeding high in the bowel. Severe sign, needs immediate attention.

Brown / Mustard Yellow - Normal color. Be happy!

Orange - Usually indicates way too much bile in stool, can occur with reflux. Seek medical advice.

White - Grossly abnormal color, usually indicates, severe bacterial imbalance and severe infection in the bowel. Kitten at risk of dying, needs medical attention, ASAP.

Consistency

Dry/hard - Abnormal, usually indicates dehydration. Seek care, promptly.

Firm - Normal, be happy.

Formed but soft - Low range of 'normal'. If stools change from firm to soft you should seek medical advice. (Formed but soft is normal for a newborn kitten.)

Toothpaste - Still has somewhat tubular form but falls apart once touched. Abnormal, seek advice.

Cow-patty - Never formed but thick enough it falls into a 'cow-patty' shape. Abnormal, animal is at significant risk and needs immediate attention.

Liquidy - Just fluid that falls out of rectum, thin and may have mucous. Abnormal, animal is at severe risk and ***must be seen immediately.***

The 'Squirts' - Animal has no control over bowel and watery fluid squirts out of rectum. Grossly abnormal, animal in danger of dying, ***must be seen immediately!***

Urine color

Red/Dark Orange - Severe sign. Severe at-risk, must be seen immediately.

Dark yellow/almost brown - Extreme dehydration or bilirubin in urine. Either way it's BAD! Needs immediate aggressive treatment.

Intense yellow - Concentrated urine. Animal is not getting enough fluid for total body hydration. Needs immediate care.

Yellow - Mildly concentrated urine. Monitor closely and if ANY other signs, seek care.

Light yellow - Mildly dilute urine. Overall body hydration should be adequate.

Pale yellow - Dilute urine. Hydration should be excellent.

Almost clear - Severely dilute urine. Risk of over-hydration. Urine should only be this dilute if under constant medical supervision.

Cleaning

Kittens MUST be kept clean. You should be able to kiss a kitten all over it's body without being concerned- that is the level of cleanliness kittens need.

A dirty kitten is susceptible to all kinds of illnesses and has a much greater chance of becoming sick.

After each feeding session, you should also give them a full-body once-over with a barely damp cloth, using short strokes like a mother cat would use. This keeps their fur clean, teaches them how to groom, and gives them the attention and "mothering" they crave. Kittens will often get very dirty in between cleanings; it's okay to wash a kitten with warm water under a sink faucet, but try to focus only on the areas where they need it. A simple "butt-bath" will usually be fine, but if you must get a kitten wet over more than half of its body, it's safe to dry kittens over one week old with a hair dryer set on low and used carefully, avoiding their faces. If you have a diffuser for your hair dryer it can be used.

You should also check their ears regularly for dirt and ear mites. Dirt can be cleaned gently with a cotton ball or swab; seek assistance if you find ear mite "coffee-ground" type dirt.

If you find fleas or flea dirt on kittens of any age, you must get them flea-free as soon as possible. Young kittens can easily get anemia from flea infestation and really endan-

ger their lives. First, use a flea comb to remove as much of the dirt and fleas from the fur as you can. Seek assistance from your vet or rescue about a flea treatment safe to use on young kittens.

If you don't have a safe flea product, you can wash the kitten with a gentle dish soap like Dawn (do not use antibacterial) and comb all of the fleas out. Make sure water temperature is warm! If you need to bathe an entire litter, do **ONE KITTEN** at a time. Do not place a wet kitten back in it's carrier or nest while washing the rest of the litter. Remember that kittens under 2 weeks of age cannot shiver and can only regulate their body temperature 12 degrees.

Bedding in a kitten's nest should be changed daily, or several times a day, as need. Once the kittens start to eliminate on their own, bedding will need to be changed frequently.



Housing

Your first priority should be to keep the kitten warm. New-borns younger than 2 weeks old lack the shiver reflex and will lose body heat very rapidly. A normal kitten's rectal temperature will range from 97° - 99°F for the first week, 98° - 100°F for the second and third weeks, and will then reach a normal adult temperature of 100° - 102°F by the fourth week. You can provide constant heat with an incubator, or if that's not available, you can use hot water bottles, dryer-warmed towels, or a micro-waved tube sock containing uncooked white rice, all of which must be reheated every OFTEN. You can use an electric heating pad but there MUST be several layers of towels or fleece between the heating pad and the kitten, and no way for the kitten to get to the heating pad or they may get burned. An ideal sleeping area is between 85° - 88°F for the first 3 weeks, then 79°F thereafter. A chilled kitten will likely die from accompanying metabolic problems related to the heat loss. You must warm a chilled kitten SLOWLY (too rapid warming can result in death). A chilled kitten will also most likely be dehydrated.

A kitten under 2 weeks can only regulate their own body temperature by 12 degrees. So if the room the kitten is living in is 75 degrees, the kitten would likely not make it without a heat source. Keeping a kitten warm is VERY important.

Cages & Carriers

Please be careful of bar spacing in whatever you use as a cage for baby kittens. Bar spacing should be 1/2" or less.

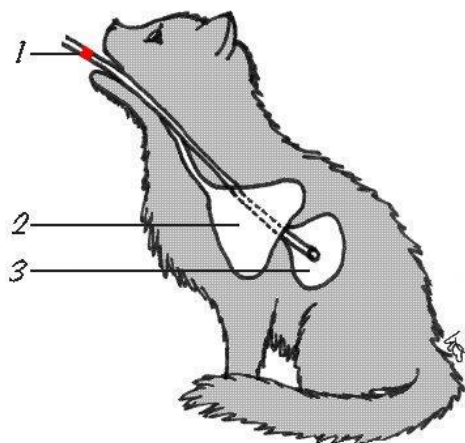
OK:



Not
OK:



Tube Feeding



1 = catheter with marking, 2 = lungs, 3 = stomach.

Tube feeding can be a life-saving skill when attempting to take care of very small or weak kittens. Not only is it much safer than bottle and syringe feeding, once the technique is learned it is much simpler and quicker.

The biggest danger from bottle or syringe feeding is the aspiration of fluid from too much flow or a weak suckle reflex. In older kittens, it is often fairly difficult to get a measured amount of food in their tummies as it usually ends up all over their faces, your shirt, and the walls. Tube feeding reduces the risk of aspiration and allows an exact amount of food to be placed directly into the stomach fairly quickly.



Step 1: Measuring the Feeding Tube

Most important for avoiding aspiration is making sure that the feeding tube is all the way in the stomach and that it does not slip out during feeding. The easiest way to measure is to place the end of the tube along the spine where the stomach is (a little lower than the middle) and measure to the tip of the nose. Mark the tube with a permanent marker or piece of tape at this point. This may be a little longer than needed, but you will be able to see if the tube is slipping out and keep it in place.



Step 2: Inserting the Tube:

Starting at the back of the mouth, guide the feeding tube slowly down the kitten's throat until you see your mark. You will feel two points of resistance: at the back of the kitten's throat and at the opening to the stomach. Just remember, if you have not reached your mark, you are not in far enough, even if it feels like it has stopped. Gently withdraw the tube and try again, using gentle pressure until the tube slides past the resistance. You will also feel the tube stop in the stomach when you near your mark. If you go too far (mostly in larger kittens) the tube will fold around in the stomach and start to come back out.



Step 3: Administering the Feeding

You don't have to get the mark all the way into the kitten's mouth, it's not exact. You just want to make sure that you are at least in the stomach and watch the mark during feeding to make sure the tube does not slip out at all. Once the tube is in, hold it in place with your fingers and slowly depress the syringe. You do not want to press too fast or the food will squirt out of the end. You can practice the speed of delivery into a cup before feeding the kitten if necessary. When you are done, remove the tube. Important: NEVER attempt to withdraw fluid from the kitten's stomach with a feeding tube. If the tube clogs, simply remove it, clear the clog, and start over. Creating suction in the stomach is dangerous. Pinch the tube when removing so no formula leaks out of the tube on the way out.

Common Health Issues

Assess the Health of the Kittens

Healthy kittens cry just a little, squirm around a bit, eat a lot, sleep a lot, and gain weight. Sick kittens are inactive, cry a lot, may not eat much, and just look “not quite right.” When in doubt, see a veterinarian. Kittens do not have a lot of reserves and can become very ill very fast!

Major Threats to the Health of Newborn Kittens: Hypothermia, Dehydration, Diarrhea, Hypoglycemia, Flea Anemia.

Hypothermia (Chilling)

Important: Never feed a cold kitten!

How to tell: pads of feet and/or ears feel cool or cold. Put your finger in the kitten’s mouth, if it feels cold, then the kitten’s temperature is too low. Take the kittens temperature. A low temperature is life threatening and must be dealt with immediately. Warm up hypothermic kittens slowly over 1– 2 hours. Check their sugar as well- when a kitten is hypothermic, their blood sugar usually drops as well.

Put Vaseline on rectal thermometer before inserting it.

Rectal temperatures:

Newborn kitten: 97–99°F

By Week 2: 98–100°F

By Week 4: 100–102°F

Dehydration

Assess for dehydration in kittens younger than 6 weeks by looking at their urine (should be very light yellow if they are properly hydrated; dark urine means dehydrated), and their mouths (gums should be moist and slightly slippery to the touch; pale and dry gums indicate dehydration).

Other signs include:

- Pull up scruff of neck and it stays up .
- Eyes are open but look sunken.
- Face looks drawn at sides (normal would look round).
- Kitten acts lethargic.
- Not eating well, not latching on to nipple.

If you see mild dehydration in your kitten and they will nurse, you can mix some unflavored Pedialyte with their formula. If they refuse to nurse then they need to be rehydrated with subQ fluids. You can do this at home if you know how and have the supplies to do so, or you can seek advice from someone who does, or contact a vet.

DO NOT EVER attempt to force water, formula, or Pedialyte orally into a kitten. They will aspirate (get fluids in their lungs) which can kill them.



Tent Test

Immediate snap back - Excellent hydration.

Quick snap but not immediate - Hydrated. Monitor other signs to be sure the kitten is overall (full body) hydrated.

Snap back within one second - Adequate hydration. However, if ANY other signs, this animal is at risk and needs care.

Within 1-3 seconds - Dehydrated. Needs immediate attention.

Stands up on own; stays up - **SEVERE dehydration. DYING. Must be seen immediately!**

Diarrhea

There are MANY causes of Diarrhea in kittens, but the most important thing to know is that bad diarrhea can be lethal. Baby kittens can get dehydrated quickly due to diarrhea and it can and often does kill them.

*****If kittens become collapsed and dehydrated due to diarrhea they need immediate veterinary attention if they are to survive. Kittens in a collapsed state become chilled very rapidly. Do not delay going to the vet. Go. Immediately. *****

Diarrhea can be caused by feeding too much, feeding food too rich (not mixing powdered formula with enough water) feeding canned food too young, internal parasites, bacterial or viral infections, digestive issues, etc.

The treatment for diarrhea varies based on the age of the

kitten, What is causing the diarrhea, what they are eating, and how their overall health is.

First make sure you are feeding the kitten correctly. Make sure you are following the mixing directions on the formula container **exactly**. These may vary by brand. Make sure that you are not overfeeding the kitten. Overfeeding is a common cause of diarrhea.

Under 3 weeks: You can try mixing their formula with unflavored Pedialyte. Only try this if diarrhea is mild and the kitten looks/acts healthy otherwise. If diarrhea is severe, or the kitten is lethargic or refusing to feed then the kitten needs to go to a vet immediately.

Kittens over 3 weeks: Try adding some pedialyte and some purred (canned) 100% pumpkin to their formula. Pumpkin is high in fiber and helps regulate the bowels.

I cannot stress enough that Diarrhea is a **major issue**.

Another common cause of diarrhea is internal parasites.

Roundworms

Kittens become infected with roundworms through their mother's milk. A majority of abandoned neonatal kittens have roundworm infestations. Infected kittens may lose their appetite, appear depressed, have diarrhea, become anemic, and pass mucus or blood in their stool. Roundworms may also be visible in the kitten's feces. They look like spaghetti.

Hookworms

Hookworm infestation is also passed to the kitten through the mother's milk. An acute infestation of hookworms in

kittens can cause anemia, and potentially kill the kitten from loss of blood. The stool of the kitten will appear very black and possibly bloody.

Tapeworms

Tapeworms are not life threatening. A kitten becomes infected by ingesting a flea that is infected with a tapeworm. You may notice white rice looking segments around the kitten's anus. Kittens are usually treated for tapeworms at six weeks of age.

Giardia

Giardia is a protozoa (an organism composed of a single cell) parasite of the small intestine tract. Giardia interferes with the absorption of nutrients and fluids by the intestines. This malabsorption leads to severe diarrhea. A yellowish, foamy, soft stool can be an indication of Giardia. A kitten with Giardia needs medication immediately.

Coccidia

Coccidia is a protozoa parasite of the small intestine and the beginning of the large intestine. Kittens can develop dysentery from Coccidia and die. The kitten's stool will contain mucus and blood. Coccidia often causes stool to have a sickeningly "sweet" smell. ***Coccidia is a MAJOR issue and will need to be treat immediately.***

Kittens can begin a deworming schedule as young as 10 days old (and in some circumstances can be treated earlier.) If you are raising an entire litter, I suggest taking in one kitten for a fecal at your vet. You may be able to just bring in a stool sample. If one kitten out of the litter has it, they all do.

Remember: While an adult cat can have parasitic infestations without any signs, these same parasites can kill a kitten quickly. There is no “wait and see” when it comes to kittens– if you are unsure about a kitten’s health, you need to seek advice from a veterinarian or more experienced care giver ASAP.

Hypoglycemia

Hypoglycemia is low blood sugar.

Hypoglycemic kittens are weak, depressed, and inactive, and may have muscle twitching and/or convulsions. Place a small amount of Karo syrup on gums (this will raise the kitten’s blood sugar) and ***take kitten to a veterinarian immediately!***

Hypoglycemia is an emergency. Karo syrup should be used to help stabilize the kitten while you are seeking help, not to treat the kitten.

Most instances of hypoglycemia in kittens are the result of inadequate nutrition; either not enough or poor quality (indigestible) food. Excessive exercise, cold environmental temperatures, and infections may also cause the body to use up more sugar than is available.



Flea Anemia

Caused by severe flea infestation. If one of the kittens has fleas, they all do.

Although each flea only consumes a small drop of blood, fleas commonly attack in large numbers and an infestation can literally lead to anemia & even death. It is essential that your home be free of fleas before bringing home a small kitten and that you get any fleas on the kitten OFF as soon as you get it home. *Most kittens found outdoors or pulled from a shelter will have fleas.*

URI

Upper respiratory infection is a common problem in orphan kittens that have been found outdoors or pulled from a shelter.

URI is extremely contagious and easily spreads from one kitten to another. It is transmitted by direct contact with infected eye or nasal discharge, contaminated cat litter pans, food and water bowls, air borne droplets, and by human hands and clothing.

If you are working with more than one litter of kittens you MUST wash/sanitize your hands before going from one litter to another.

In kittens, mild cases of URI can develop very quickly into more serious conditions. If a kitten stops eating, develops thick yellowish-green discharge from the eyes or nose, or has difficulty breathing, it needs veterinarian at-

tention.

Herpes Virus causes watery eyes and nasal discharge with sneezing, and may also affect the eyes more severely causing eye ulcers.

Calici Virus causes similar upper respiratory symptoms and also sometimes mouth ulcers. but can be more serious and affect other parts of the body and/or be deadly. Symptoms often start with upper respiratory signs, and may also include not eating or change in eating habits due to ulcers (sores) in mouth that make it painful to chew or swallow.

– Kittens may go lame in one or more limbs, e.g., limping on left front leg or one or both back legs. (Sometimes referred to as “limping kitten syndrome”)

– There are different strains, one of which can be particularly deadly.

-- Very contagious (as is herpes virus).

Conjunctivitis

URI is a common cause of conjunctivitis in kittens. Conjunctivitis is an inflammation of the membrane lining of the eyelids. The kittens eyes will usually be pasted shut and will need to be cleaned with a warm,, damp cloth and saline solution. Eye drops or ointment will be needed to treat conjunctivitis. If left untreated it can cause blindness and the kitten's eyes may need to be removed. It is important to seek treatment for Conjunctivitis.

Panleukopenia

Feline Panleukopenia (Feline Distemper) Virus

Especially dangerous to orphaned kittens- it is very contagious. Proper hygiene and isolation of the newborns from other cats is essential. Kittens can experience life threatening diarrhea, vomiting, dehydration, fever, septicemia, & shock. It is SO VERY important to quarantine kittens away from other pets or fosters until they have had their vaccinations. Panleuk is not something you want to go through. For kittens under 8 week old, Panleuk is often fatal. You can fight it with 24 hour medical care but it will be very expensive & can be heart-breaking. There is no cure, you just have to keep the kitten alive while the virus runs its course. The survival rate for young kittens without vet care is very close to zero.

Not all cats infected with FPV show signs but if they do, they may include the following:

vomiting, bringing up clear/ yellow tinted froth/foam - like coughing up a hairball without the hair.

a variable temperature – usually a high temp in the early stages, and very low later on (right before death.)

hunger and thirst with an inability to eat or drink - may sit hunched over bowls

watery diarrhea with or without blood and mucus.

Unfortunately, sometimes there are no obvious signs and a kitten will die without warning- they will appear to “crash” and usually have a very low temp, then die. Once

it is in the environment it can quickly spread to other unvaccinated kittens. This is why mixing unvaccinated kittens from different places, litters, etc. is not something that should be done, even if the kittens appear to be healthy.

Vaccination

Vaccination is incredibly important for orphan kittens.

Normal kittens get their initial immune system from their mom's colostrum within the first 24 hours after birth, which protects them for many weeks. This protection depends on the health of the mother, and the antibodies she carries, so unvaccinated mothers or those in bad health will not offer the same protection to their kittens as those who have been vaccinated and are in good health. Because the background of most orphan kittens is unknown, you must assume that they are susceptible to anything they are exposed to and you should take great care to quarantine them.

Orphan kittens should receive their first vaccine at around 4 weeks of age.

I cannot stress enough how important vaccinations are to kittens. It is not something that can be delayed- especially if your foster home has cats/kittens going out to adoption events, new kittens or cat coming into the home, etc.

If you are picking up kittens from the shelter that are 4 weeks old or older, ask if they can vaccinate them before you take them.

Kitten Mortality

Many factors play a part in kitten mortality. Kittens born outside are subjected to influences that can significantly reduce their chances of survival. When they are born to malnourished or ill mothers, their risk of congenital or inherited defects is heightened. Poorly nourished kittens have little defense against disease and infection. Kittens who have been in shelters have been exposed to many different illnesses, may have gone without food or warmth for a prolonged period, and have unknown backgrounds.

Despite the best efforts at emergency care, proper nutrition, attention to cleanliness, correct diagnostic and medical treatment, and detailed record keeping, some kittens die.

The death of a kitten can be an emotionally disturbing experience and it is important to understand and accept that some kittens will not survive. What we can do for these kittens is surround them with warmth and care, and make their passing as comfortable as possible.

Information for this handbook has been collected from the following wonderful kitten resources:

<http://www.forgottenfelines.com/v4/foster/botbabies.shtml>

<http://www.kittenrescue.org/index.php/cat-care/kitten-care-handbook/>

<http://www.icatcare.org/advice/my-cat-having-kittens/hand-rearing-kittens>

<http://www.thecatpracticepc.com/Guides/orphans.pdf>

<http://www.nycferalcat.org/BottleFeedingKittens-Legal.pdf>

<http://www.austinhumanesociety.org/sites/default/files/newbornhandbook.pdf>

<http://indyferal.org/KittenCare.pdf>

<http://www.maddiesfund.org>

If you need more information or how-to videos, you can search online or get in touch with someone who can help you.

There are a lot of great YouTube videos that will show in-depth how to do various things for your foster kittens. If you need a visual guide, search YouTube! (Make sure to read the video's comments because this is a great way to make sure the information in the video is correct.)

