

# INSTRUCTIONS FOR CARING FOR ORPHANED KITTENS

## Body Warmth

Since they do not have the ability to regulate and control their body temperature, we must help maintain kittens' body warmth for them. If a kitten feels cold, warm it immediately but gently. If you check the kitten's temperature rectally, it should be between 97-99 degrees for kittens less than 4 weeks old and 100 and 102.5 degrees for kittens 4 weeks and older. To take a temperature, place lubricant on the tip of the thermometer and then gently place just the tip into the kitten's rectum and wait for the results.

## 5 Key Points

1. Keep kittens warm
2. Provide kittens with adequate nutrition
3. Keep kittens clean
4. Do your best to protect them from infectious disease
5. Provide socialization with people and with litter mates

If the <4 week old kitten's temperature is less than 97 degrees, place it on a heating pad wrapped in towel and burrito the towel and heating pad around the kitten or place it wrapped in a towel on a heating disk or pad. Cover the heating source with a soft folded towel or blanket so the kitten cannot lay directly on the heating source.

Check on the kitten and temperature frequently to ensure it is not too hot or too cold. Kittens should be able to get away from the heat source if they are too hot, so make sure there is a place in the cage that does not have a heating pad or disc under it. Kittens also like to have a nice nest in their cage or crate, so bundle them in a nice fleece they can crawl in and out of.

## Properly setting up a kitten to keep it toasty

1. For kittens less than 4 to 5 weeks of age, set up a cage or crate with a heating pad or snuggle safe disk on the bottom ensuring half of their house has a heated floor and half does not.
2. Place a nicely folded towel over the heat source completely covering the bottom of the cage or crate.
3. Give them a nest in a small box (a canned food carton works nicely) with a soft fleece blanket.
4. Cover the cage front or entire crate with a towel to keep the house draft-free and cozy.
5. In a foster home, find a nice warm and quiet room in your home such as a bathroom. If possible keep that room warmer than you would like it to be; 80 to 85 degrees is a good room temperature for housing kittens up to 6 to 8 weeks.

## Kitten Feeding

Cow's milk is not nutritious enough for kittens and causes diarrhea. Any prepared kitten replacement milk (KRM) or gruel must be refrigerated if not used immediately and must be discarded after 24 hours.

- KMR formula is made with 1 part powdered formula to 2 parts water
- Kittens should eat 2 tablespoons or 30 cc's of formula per 4 ounces of body weight in a 24 hour period
- Kittens less than 2 weeks of age should eat at least every 2 hours
- Kittens 2 to 4 weeks of age should eat at least every 3 to 4 hours, but they do not have to be woken up at night to feed if they are sleeping at this point
- Kittens who are weak or are not eating enough should be fed more frequently
- There will be individual variations in frequency and amounts for each kitten



## General Feeding Instructions

Test the formula temperature before feeding, it should be warm but not hot, around 100°F. You can warm the bottle by placing it in hot water for a few minutes or putting it in the microwave until it reaches 100°F. If you use the microwave be sure to

mix the formula well before testing because hot spots may develop in the heating process.

Positioning for feeding is very important. Reclining a kitten on its back while feeding can cause them to aspirate, which means the kitten breathes the

formula into their respiratory tract rather than swallowing. This can lead to a reactive pneumonia which may be fatal for the kitten. **They must be leaning forward or flat on their belly while feeding.**

Kittens are most comfortable in a position similar to the position they would be in if they were nursing from their mom. You can place the kitten on its stomach on a towel or cloth, which the kitten will cling to it and knead its paws on instinct. If the kitten is acting frantic while nursing, you may want to wrap the kitten in a towel while feeding it.

When bottle feeding, open the mouth gently with the tip of your finger and slip the nipple in. Once your kitten gets the hang of it, they will search out the nipple enthusiastically. You will feel a vacuum effect when they get into suckle mode. Watch for bubbles in the bottle during suckling and ears wiggling, this means they are suckling successfully. To keep air from getting into their stomach, hold the bottle at a 45° angle, keeping a slight pull on the bottle. They should be allowed to suck at their own pace.

If they refuse to take the nipple or will not suckle, try rubbing the kitten vigorously on its forehead or stroking its back much like their mom would. If you still cannot get them to nurse from the bottle, it is time to syringe feed them to make sure they are getting what they need. If you have a kitten you need to syringe feed, please let the foster coordinator know.

### **Syringe Feeding**

To syringe feed the kitten, mix up the KMR as usual and draw it up in one of the syringes you were provided. You can place a nipple on the end of the syringe and then try to get the kitten nursing by slowly pushing KMR out of the syringe and through the nipple into its mouth. Make sure the kitten is swallowing before you push more KMR in and the kitten is in the proper position. Let the foster coordinator know how the syringe feeding goes.

### **Feeding Multiple Kittens**

If you're feeding multiple kittens, you'll have better luck with them eating the required amount if you feed them each several times, taking turns. Feed the first kitten until it stops nursing, feed the second, etc. Then go back to the first and repeat

this process. Usually after 2 or 3 nursing turns, a kitten has had enough for one feeding.

**Kittens who seem too weak to nurse may be too cold or have an underlying medical issue. If a kitten refuses to nurse beyond the first few "getting the hang of it" times, it may indicate illness. Please contact your veterinarian.**

When a kitten has had enough formula, it will usually get some bubbles around its mouth and its tummy will be very rounded, almost pear-shaped. After each feeding session, you should give each kitten a full-body once over with a barely damp warm washcloth, using short strokes like mom would use. This activity keeps the kittens' fur clean, teaches them how to groom and gives them the socialization they need. Remember to make sure the kitten is completely dry before it is placed back in its cage.

It is natural for kittens to suckle on each other or on your fingers, even after they're finished eating. If kittens are suckling on each other excessively, you may need to increase the frequency of feedings. If littermate suckling becomes problematic, especially around the genital area, you may need to separate the kittens. It is a good idea to check each kitten's genitals to ensure the sucking activity is not



causing problems (redness, irritation, penis hanging out, etc.). Suckling on genitals can lead to the urethra swelling shut and having to be surgically reopened. If any of this occurs, please contact the medical department immediately.

## Weaning

A kitten is ready for weaning when he or she is biting the bottle nipple often and forcefully, and is able to lick formula from your finger. It is usually necessary to continue bottle feeding through the weaning process to ensure kittens get adequate nutrition and are not overly stressed.

1. Get the kitten to lap up formula from your finger and then a spoon.
2. Once they have mastered that, try putting it in a flat dish.
3. Introduce the kittens to solid food by offering warm canned food mixed into a thin gruel with prepared kitten formula. Eventually, you can gradually reduce the amount of formula you are mixing with canned food until they are eating just the food.
4. Place the food in a shallow dish. Some kittens will begin lapping right away, while others will prefer to lick the gruel from your fingers. Allow them to do so and slowly lower your finger to the dish.

The kittens may bite the edge of the dish or walk in the food. Sometimes it takes two to three meals or more before they really catch on. If a kitten does not seem interested in the gruel at all, try gently opening the kitten's mouth and rubbing a little of the food on his tongue or teeth. Be patient as the weaning process takes time. As the kittens catch on, begin to thicken the gruel. **Remember as you thicken the gruel, the kittens should always have access to fresh water in a low, spill-resistant bowl.**

Kittens usually walk through their food. Make sure they are cleaned and DRY before putting them in their cage. Most weaning kittens are messy eaters; do not leave gruel or water in their cage because being wet rapidly causes body temperature to drop.

## Stimulation for Urination and Defecation

Mother cats groom their kittens to stimulate urination and defecation on a regular basis. If you are acting as the baby's new mom, you are tasked with this important duty. Very young orphan kittens will not be able to urinate and defecate without your help, so this is a crucial job.

Before and after each feeding, gently rub the kitten on its lower abdomen, as well as the genitals and rectum with a cotton ball/pad dipped in warm water or a fragrance free baby wipe. Make sure you rub only enough to get them to eliminate because overstimulation will irritate the area. Keep an eye out for chafing and lingering dirt and do not let them get chilled. Kittens should and almost always will urinate during every stimulation. They should defecate at least once daily.

- **Kittens need to be stimulated until about 3 weeks of age**
- **Kittens should be stimulated before and after each feeding**
- **Kitten should urinate every time and defecate at least once daily**



When kittens get to be about 3 to 4 weeks old, they don't usually need our help. Place a litter box in their crate or cage with litter that is provided. The clumping litter can create clumps in their stomachs and respiratory passages, so avoid it in young kittens.

When you introduce a litter box, it is a good time to introduce some dry kitten food so they chew on the food and not their litter. When you are teaching a kitten to use a litter box, it sometimes helps to place their feces in the box so they smell it in there. If you have a kitten who is defecating on its towel instead of in the box, move the feces in the box instead of completely cleaning it out of the cage.

## Weight Gain and Developmental Milestones

Kittens should gain about ½ ounce every day or 4 ounces per week. Weigh them at the same time every day with a kitchen or small postal scale. Lack of weight gain in a 24 hour period is a cause for concern and the



kitten should be closely monitored. **Weight loss is cause for alarm and it is time to begin syringe feeding the kitten, as well as alerting the shelter.**

| Age         | Weight       | Milestones  |
|-------------|--------------|---|
| Birth       | 2 - 4 ounces | Eyes and ears are closed  |
| 2 - 3 days  |              | Umbilical cord falls off  |
| 4 days      |              | Begins to purr  |
| 10 -14 days | 8 ounces     | Eyes and ears should be open  |
| 2 - 3 weeks | 12 ounces    | Baby incisors erupt, can begin to eliminate without help, crawling, walking. Ready for deworming.             |
| 4 weeks     | 1 pound      | Baby canine teeth erupt, beginning to walk but do not have great balance. Ready for first vaccine.            |
| 6 weeks     | 1.5 pounds   | Baby premolars erupt. Running, playing, using the litter box, grooming themselves. Can begin dry kitten food. |
| 8 weeks     | 2 pounds     | Ready for spay/neuter surgery and adoption!   |

### Bathing and Socialization

Kittens need exercise to promote muscular and circulatory development, but will not be ready for play until about 3 weeks of age. Play with and handle kittens prior to feeding.

After each feeding session, you should also give them a full-body once over with a barely damp washcloth, using short strokes like a mom cat would use. Kittens will often get very dirty between cleanings and it is 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 do the trick. **Your body heat is not enough to warm up a cold kitten - you need to use towels/blankets and heating pads set on low. Make sure you do not leave a kitten until it is completely dry.**

### Bath Time for Underage Kitten

1. Get a small sink or a basin ready with some warm water. If they are really dirty, a small amount of Dawn or baby shampoo can be used in the water. Make the water a nice warm temperature like you were taking a bath.
2. Have some towels, preferably warmed in the dryer, ready to immediately dry him or her off.
3. Wear long sleeves and gloves if you would like as some little kittens start to scratch. Holding kittens gently by the scruff while still supporting their body may help to both calm and control the kitten.
4. Give the kitten a quick but thorough bath to remove any food and feces. If only his or her butt is dirty, then there is no need to immerse the whole kitten.
5. Rinse the kitten off with warm water and immediately wrap him or her in the towel.
6. Rub vigorously to dry the kitten nice. If the first towel is wet, switch to a new dry towel.
7. Keep the kitten with you and do not put it back in his or her cage until completely dry. If needed you may also want to wrap a heating pad around the outside of the towel while the kitten is drying.



## Common Kitten Medical Warning Signs

If the kitten shows any of the symptoms below, notify the foster coordinator and veterinarian. In most instances it will be nothing, but kittens at this age are fragile and need to receive treatment quickly so we would rather play it safe.

### Red Flags

If any of these things occur, you should contact your veterinarian immediately:

- Kitten did not eat at all during last meal
- Kitten had weight loss
- Kitten has liquid diarrhea
- Kitten is dehydrated
- Kitten is listless
- Kitten has repeated vomiting
- Kitten is bleeding
- Kitten has neurologic signs

### Yellow Flags

If any of these things occur, you should monitor the kitten and schedule an appointment with your veterinarian.

- Kitten has sneezing, wheezing, nasal discharge and/or coughing
- Kitten has ocular discharge
- Kitten has mild lethargy or depression
- Kitten did not gain weight
- Kitten has loose stool
- Kitten has occasional vomiting
- Kitten has decreased appetite
- Kitten has difficulty urinating or defecating
- Kitten is limping
- Kitten has unusual behavior

