

Caring for Orphaned Kittens

This is a basic guide to get you started. There are also many good videos available. Please check out www.kittenlady.org

What To do when you find a kitten/Feeding Techniques /Kitten Feeding Schedule

Important – before feeding! If the kitten feels cold, the kitten must be warmed up before attempting to feed! Forcing food into a chilled, hypothermic kitten can cause death. You can use a hair dryer set on low, carefully moving it so as not to burn the kitten. You may also dab Karo syrup, honey or water/sugar mixture on gums every 15-30 minutes if kitten is non-responsive until kitten responds. The nipples on the bottles need to be opened using a hot needle to make a small hole, or a razor blade to cut a small X. Comb for fleas and bathe in a gentle, warm bath with Dawn soap, avoiding eyes. Fleas can kill a kitten. **Resource:** <http://www.kittenlady.org/fleas>

Keeping Good Records: After every feed, keep a record of how much your kitten has taken. This will help you work out whether he is drinking enough throughout the day. Also, to keep track of his development weigh him about the same time every day, twice a day, using kitchen or small postage scales. A kitten that is doing well will put on between 10-20 grams a day. Keep a record of his weight so that you can identify any weight loss quickly. Your vet will also be glad that you took the time to keep these records, in case something happens down the road.

Kitten Weight:

At birth, weight should be approx 3-4 ounces. Feed every 2 hours.

At age 1 week weight should be approx. 4 ounces. Feed every 2-3 hours.

At age 2 weeks, weight should be approx. 7 ounces. Feed every 3-4 hours.

At age 3 weeks, weight should be approx. 10 ounces. Feed every 4-5 hours.

At age 4 weeks weight should be approx. 13 ounces. Feed every 5 hours and begin weaning.

At age 5 weeks, weight should be approximately 1lb. Continue weaning with supplemental feeding as needed.

By the end of the 8th week, kittens should weigh approximately 2.2 pounds and fully weaned.

Of course, all these weights are approximate. You may have a kitten that is slightly under or over these weights and still be perfectly healthy. If ever you have a concern about your kitten, or he just doesn't seem 'right', consult a vet. The important thing is that kittens should be putting on weight daily; if they start to lose weight, something is wrong. There are some excellent resources including videos on the internet; simply do a search on 'caring for orphaned kittens'.

Birth to two weeks. For the first week of life, a kitten's main activities are eating and sleeping. He is deaf and blind but can crawl a little. The remnants of his umbilical cord will fall off at around 3 days of life. After it falls off, watch the area carefully, as it can easily become infected. Use a Q-tip to dab the area with some antiseptic solution.



Once he is lapping formula from the bowl, you can gradually mix in a little wet kitten food. Do this by mashing a little canned food, add formula and mix thoroughly until you have a milkshake-like consistency. Gradually decrease the amount of formula and increase the amount of kitten food over a few days until he is eating just kitten food. Feed small amounts several times a day. A kitten's digestive system is still developing at this stage so important not to overwhelm it.

Continue offering formula in a bottle after he has first learned to lap from the bowl. Once you are confident that he is getting enough food by himself (keep weighing the kitten twice a day!) withdraw the bottle feedings. During the weaning process, he may dip his paws or walk in his food. Although messy, this is a natural part of weaning and his way of exploring this new food. You can lay newspaper under and around his bowl to make cleaning up easier. This is another reason a jar lid comes in handy. He can't really walk in to the whole thing and rarely do the lids tip over.

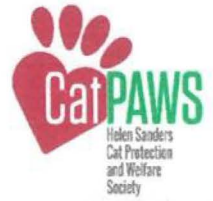
Don't forget to have fresh water in a bowl alongside the food for him to drink. If he is eating but not drinking water, you can carefully give him 5cc of water with a feeding syringe a few times a day until he begins drinking by himself. Give this water slowly in the side of mouth and not straight down the throat.

Six to Seven weeks. By the seventh week, your kitten should be completely weaned and eating food from his bowl. Feed him a good quality wet kitten food and introduce him to dry kitten food as well. He will be very playful. Supervise play and avoid strings, shoelaces, plastic bags or anything that can be eaten, chewed, swallowed or be a choking hazard. No need for expensive toys! Empty cardboard boxes work well or knotted socks as long as there are no frayed edges and threads.

Play is very important for proper socialization of your kitten. Just like a human child, the more he plays and explores the more he will grow, mentally and physically. Also, while he eats, sit on the floor near him and gently talk to him, or even read to him. Cats are social animals and the more you interact with this little one the more socially developed he will become. This is especially important with shy or even 'hissy' kittens! Cuddle that hissing kitten even if he or she doesn't want to! You can turn a kitten from spice to nice! It is so important at that age and will help get the kitten adopted.

Keeping Your Kitten Warm. Your first priority is warmth for your kitten. Chilly night air can be deadly, especially to a wet kitten. If your kitten is wet, getting him dry becomes paramount. Gently dry him off with a towel and if it doesn't cause him to be too anxious, blow-dry him with a hairdryer set on low. Avoid the hairdryer blowing in his face. If he becomes restless, then place some dry towels in your dryer and set the heat on low. Let the towels cycle for about 10 minutes and using a warmed towel, wrap your kitten securely, cuddling him to your chest near your heart. Once the towel cools down, replace it with another one that was kept warm in the dryer. Kittens younger than 10 days old are not yet equipped with a shiver reflex, therefore they cannot maintain their own body heat.

Place some soft bedding (blanket or towels) in the bottom of a clean box and place the box in a warm, draught-free spot. If you have a pet heating pad, place this under the bedding, but give your kitten room to move off the heat if it becomes too warm. Never use a human electric blanket or a human heating pad to keep a kitten warm, as it can cause hot spots on the fragile skin and burn your kitten.



The consistency and color of the kitten's stools will give you an idea as to whether you are feeding him the right amount and strength of formula. Normal stools have a toothpaste consistency and are a yellow, mustard color. If the kitten develops diarrhea or greenish stool, you may be overfeeding or the formula may be too rich for his digestive system. Try diluting the formula. It may be that the kitten has worms. A gentle dewormer is fenbendazole which can be purchased without prescription from Amazon. It's called 'goat dewormer' but don't be alarmed; experienced rescuers use it all the time. Use one-tenth to one-quarter of one milliliter – just a tiny, tiny amount – per pound of kitten per day for 3-5 days. So a 4 week old, one pound kitten would get 1/10th to 1/4 of a one milliliter size syringe. **Resource:** Look on Amazon for: Merck Safeguard Goat Dewormer, 125ml

Kitten Hygiene. Kittens are fragile and sensitive to disease and infections. This is particularly true for kittens that did not get any milk from their mother. During the first few days after the birth, the mother-cat secretes a special condensed milk called colostrum. The colostrum contains vital antibodies that provide the kitten with passive immunity to many different kinds of disease. Without the colostrum, kittens are more susceptible to disease. In some areas you can obtain colostrum from your vet or the larger pet food chains.

It is important to keep your kitten isolated from other pets and people until he is older. Always wash your hands thoroughly before and after handling your kitten. His bedding material will also become soiled and wet and should be changed frequently. Avoid handling your kitten too roughly and if you have younger children, keep them from handling the newcomer if at all possible. Use a toothbrush for their fur, NOT for their teeth.

All items used for feeding your kitten must be washed in hot, soapy water, rinsed well and then sterilized by immersing in boiling water. This does not apply to the feeding syringes; simply rinsing them out with hot water right after feeding, and storing in an airtight container helps keep away the germs. Using dishwashing soap will corrode the rubber inside and make feeding virtually impossible after a few washes. Do not boil these plastic syringes as they will melt quickly. Keep all your supplies together in one place so you can find them easily. Some people store in a container in the refrigerator. When you wake up at 1:00 a.m. / 4:00 a.m and 7:00 a.m. for a feedings, it is nice to know that your items needed are right on hand! Simply run hot water over the syringes and bottles to warm up the items prior to use. If you have pre-mixed chilled formula, do not microwave it! You can heat or microwave a cup or dish of water first, then place the bottle of formula in it to warm.

When a kitten dies. Sometimes, despite your best efforts and care, a kitten will die. Whether it be FKS (Fading Kitten Syndrome) or an unseen problem with the kitten's internal organs or disease, it is always difficult to lose a kitten that you may have bonded closely with. It can be a very distressing time for you but you can take comfort in the knowledge that you did all you could and your kitten's last days or weeks were spent in the care of you, a person who loved and cared for him or her.

Fading Kitten Syndrome: We compare this to SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome). Suddenly a kitten that appears to be healthy begins to fade. No matter what measures are enacted to save this fragile being, it slips away and you are left with so many questions and an ache in your heart. Did you do the right thing? Could you have prevented this needless death? Chances are you did everything humanely possible to save this kitten. Perhaps the kitten was robbed early on of that first critical period where mom's colostrum could have saved him or her. You will never know. Experienced cat rescuers have all encountered this devastating occurrence. Sometimes there is nothing anyone can do to stop it; only love the kitten while he is among the living and mourn him or her in passing. **You cared, you tried, you did something and that is what matters.**