



Arnprior Regional Cat Rescue

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Fostering Kittens Guide

Introduction

This document will help you if you are fostering a mama and her litter of kittens. If you have any questions or just need to talk something out please reach out to your foster coordinator via email or facebook messenger.

Kitten Growth Chart

Kitten growth milestones

Age	Weight	Milestone
Birth	2 - 4 Ounces	• Eyes and ears are closed • Sleeps 90% of the time • Minimal Handling
2 - 3 Days		• Umbilical cords falls off
4 Days		• Beings to purr
10 - 14 Days	8 Ounces	• Eyes and ears should be open • Healthy kittens will be round and warm with pink skin and will rarely cry
2 - 3 Weeks	12 Ounces	• Baby incisors erupt, can begin to eliminate without help • Will start crawling, standing and playing with littermates • Begin regular handling • Ready for deworming
4 Weeks	1 Pound	• Baby canine teeth erupt, beginning to walk but do not have great balance, will begin to groom themselves, able to thermoregulate • Ready for gruel and may be ready for introduction of dry kitten food
6 Weeks	1.5 Pounds	• Baby premolars erupt

		• Running, playing, using the litter box, grooming themselves • Should be eating dry kitten food, supplemented with canned
8 Weeks	2 Pounds	

Daily Care for Moms With Kittens

Most mothers, even first-timers, can take care of themselves and their offspring quite well. For the most part, you will leave mom and babies alone while observing for any signs of trouble. Provide a nesting box for nursing mothers so babies can't get out but mom can when she needs some peace and quiet. Only half of the nesting box should have extra warmth added

Young Kitten Care

A kitten's survival depends on getting consistent nutrition and warmth. The mother's colostrum, which is the first milk produced, is vitally important to a newborn's cardiovascular system and defense against disease. Colostrum is rich in antibodies to help protect against various infections, but kittens can only absorb these antibodies and benefit from them for a short period after birth. It is very important that newborns nurse as soon as possible after birth. If they do not find a nipple on their own, put their mouth close to one and hold them until they nurse.

Continued healthy nursing behavior is crucial for kitten survival. In order to tell if the kittens are nursing, put on exam gloves and gently pick up each kitten and feel for a round belly full of milk. A flat or concave belly indicates that the kitten may not be nursing. You should perform this check once or twice a day. Also, visually confirm that each kitten is actually latching onto mom. A gram scale works great to log each kitten's weight. Healthy kittens should gain a little weight each day.

Problem Signs

During the first two weeks, kittens should spend approximately 90% of the time eating and sleeping. If kittens are crying during or after eating, they are usually becoming ill or are not getting adequate milk. A newborn kitten is very susceptible to infections and can die within 24 hours. If excessive crying occurs, the mother and entire litter should be examined by a veterinarian, so please call us immediately.

Supplemental Feeding for Nursing Kittens with Moms

When adequate nursing isn't possible, supplemental feeding one to three times per day may be recommended, especially for any litter with more than five kittens. We will supply you with liquid or powdered Kitten Milk Replacer (KMR) for supplemental feeding. The temperature of the milk replacer can be tested on your forearm and should be about the same as one's skin. The KMR container gives directions concerning feeding amount.

NOTE: Do not hold kittens on their backs like human babies or squeeze the bottle while feeding—this can cause kittens to aspirate the milk, choke and/or catch pneumonia.

If the kittens are still nursing from their mother, the amounts recommended will be excessive. Generally, one-third to half of the listed amount should be the daily goal. Supplemental feeding may be continued until the kittens are old enough to eat kitten food. If the mother does not produce milk or her milk becomes infected, the kittens will cry excessively. If this occurs, the entire litter could die within 24 to 48 hours. Total replacement feeding, using the KMR, or adopting the kittens to another nursing mother, is usually necessary. If replacement feeding is elected, the amounts of milk listed on the KMR container should be fed. Kittens less than two weeks of age should be fed every 3 to 4 hours. Kittens 2 to 4 weeks old do well with feedings every 4 to 6 hours. Don't feel like you have to wake them up to feed—if they're full enough to sleep peacefully, let them rest until they wake up hungry.

Daily Care for Orphaned Kittens

Please note that young kittens are extremely fragile, and some may die no matter how well you take care of them (sometimes 1 out of 4 in the first week alone). Remain attentive to your foster kittens and provide them with the best possible care; as difficult as it is to lose a foster pet, you should not blame yourself. In the unfortunate event that your foster kitten passes away, contact the volunteer director as soon as possible

Daily Care for Newborns Using a Bottle (0-3 Weeks)

Young kittens need to be fed every 2-4 hours throughout the day and night. Sometimes bottle feeding can be challenging, and if your kitten will not take the milk replacer from the bottle you may wait until the next feeding to try again. However, if your kitten has not eaten in two consecutive feedings, please contact us right away. Kitten Milk Replacer (KMR) formula will be provided for all kittens requiring bottle feeding. Please follow the directions provided with the KMR to mix the formula (one part formula to two parts water). For the first couple of feedings, you may increase the amount of water slightly to dilute the formula and help reduce digestive upset. Mixed formula that has not been warmed can be saved in the refrigerator for up to 24 hours. The unmixed powder formula should also be kept in the refrigerator after being opened and be kept for up to 3 months. Prepare only the amount of formula your litter of kittens will need for each feeding. Kittens will usually need about 4mL per 100g of body weight per feeding, or about 30mL over a 24-hour period. Formula should be warmed by placing the bottle of cold KMR upright in a mug of hot water. Check the temperature of the formula on the inside of your wrist before feeding each kitten. The temperature should be warm to the touch but not hot. .

Safe Feeding

You should also test the nipple on your bottle and make sure the formula drips out slowly. It is very easy for kittens to aspirate (inhale fluids into the lungs). If formula comes out of the kitten's nose, stop feeding immediately. Do not feed any more until the kitten has completely cleared the fluid from its lungs, usually by sneezing. If crackling or popping is heard as the kitten breathes, or if you suspect your kitten may have aspirated formula, contact us immediately. Kittens should be warm before feeding to digest food properly. Prepare kittens for feeding by placing them on their stomachs or wrapping them in a small towel like a taco if they are fussy. (See how-to

resource at the end of this guide.) If wrapped in a towel, make sure the kitten can still knead with her forelegs outside of the towel and that she is not on her back, which can cause aspiration. When placed on her stomach, make sure she is in an upright position with her head tilted slightly up and neck extended (as if she was nursing from mom). Support the lower body with the palm of your hand and hold the head steady with your thumb and forefinger. Never force milk down by squeezing the bottle since this can cause aspiration. Bottle feeding takes practice and patience to master. Make sure you do not overfeed the kitten by checking her tummy for fullness while feeding. After bottle feeding, gently burp the kitten by placing her on her stomach in the palm of one hand and patting her on the back a few times with the other hand. This will allow any air ingested to be expelled, however, you won't hear the kitten "burp". Clean out your bottle with soap and water between feedings. After the kitten has finished feeding, you must now stimulate the kitten to urinate and defecate. Kittens should defecate at least once a day and should urinate every time.

Elimination

If you are fostering orphaned kittens, or mom is unable to care for her babies, it is necessary to stimulate kittens less than 3 weeks of age to urinate and defecate. The voiding reflex is normally initiated by the mother licking the kitten's ano-genital region. The foster caregiver must therefore imitate this by gently massaging the kitten's anogenital area with a warm damp cloth or cotton ball. This should be done after each feeding, and each kitten should pass urine and have a bowel movement at least once a day.

Daily Care for Kittens Transitioning to Wet Food (3-5 Weeks)

Transitioning kittens should be fed "gruel," which is a pudding-like consistency mix of KMR or water and wet kitten food. They should be fed every 4-6 hours and supplemental bottle feeding may be necessary if they are not taking to the canned food. You are welcome to experiment with different consistencies but the gruel should be gradually thickened to get them ready for solid food. Leftover gruel should be discarded immediately if not eaten. Canned food that has not been made into gruel yet can be covered and refrigerated for up to 48 hours. Once kittens have teeth, they could start to chew the nipple on a bottle, which can be very dangerous due to small pieces being ingested. This must be monitored closely. Fresh water should be provided at all times for transitioning kittens. To encourage a kitten to eat the gruel, place a small amount on your finger and place it on the kitten's tongue or lips. The goal is that she will eat on her own

from a plate or bowl. This transition period can take days to weeks. At this age, stimulation should no longer be necessary and she will begin urinating and defecating on her own. Continue until you notice urine and feces in the housing area. Small litter boxes should be provided at this stage with non-clumping litter. Kittens will eventually learn how to use a litter box on their own but accidents are common for the first few weeks. If they defecate outside, move the feces to the litter box. You can also place kittens inside their litter box after meals.

Daily Care for Kittens Eating on their Own (5-8+ Weeks)

Kittens who are eating completely on their own will need to be fed wet food about three times throughout the day. They should always have dry food and water available. Don't forget to clean their litter box at least once a day (and focus on and enjoy this socialization period!)

Grooming, Bathing & Socializing

Grooming & Bathing

Kittens should be kept clean and will often need bathing since they are so messy. Less is more for bathing kittens. Try to spot clean by only rinsing the kitten with warm water where he is dirty, such as his bottom. Make sure to not get a lot of water on his head, especially the eyes, nose and ears. If there is food stuck on his face, use a warm damp cloth. Kittens cannot be put back into their home until they are completely dry. You can use a blow dryer on the lowest setting after towel drying.

Socializing Your Foster Kitten

Socialization is critical for young kittens, and they will need multiple short socialization sessions on a daily basis, as well as playtime and enrichment to help them learn to enjoy being around people.

Please follow these steps for socializing foster kittens:

- Keep the kittens confined to a dog crate in a quiet room for the first few days to make sure they are eating well & adjusting to the new environment. Offer them their carrier without its door or a cardboard box inside the crate and cover the crate with a sheet so they feel more secure.

- The crate should be in a secure, cat-proof room where kittens cannot run away and hide once you start letting them out of the crate.
- Once they are eating well and comfortable, and after the initial 14-day quarantine, allow them to explore this cat-proofed area when supervised; keep them confined when not supervised.
- Make sure to use every meal time as a socialization event. Offer kittens food and sit with them while they eat. Eventually work toward putting the food on your finger and having them eat it from there. Once they are comfortable with this, slowly bring the food closer to you so that they have to climb on your lap to get the food. Progress to petting them while they eat, starting with their face and shoulders. Eventually work on handling more and more and then finally, picking up. See how [here](#)
- Short socialization sessions (3-5 minutes) several times a day are better than one or two long sessions.
- Once the kittens become social with you, have friends or family interact with them too, so that they learn to be social with everyone.
- Work on getting them used to household noises and voices by slowly introducing them (i.e. talking in a normal voice, laughing, opening cabinets, etc.)
- Always pair food or playtime with your presence, whether or not you are touching/interacting with them.
- Give them safe objects to explore, such as paper bags and cardboard boxes.
- Do not allow them to play with your hands or feet. This will encourage play biting which will continue and be painful once they get older.
- Allow them to walk on different surfaces and explore when supervised.

Top Tips For Foster Kitten Caregivers

The five fundamental needs of kittens that need to be met by a foster caregiver:

- Keep kittens warm.
- Provide kittens with adequate nutrition.
- Keep kittens clean.
- Provide socialization.
- Do your best to protect them from infectious disease.

Kitten-proof your home:

- Keep medications, cleaners, electrical cords, electrical outlets, and house plants out of reach from your foster pets.
- Block access to any small hiding places such as under beds or behind cabinets