

Itty Bitty Kitty Care

Typically kittens under 1 pound without their mother have a very poor prognosis and a very high mortality rate. Occasionally the Queen becomes ill or is otherwise unable to care for her kittens and the foster parent has to take over the job of mothering. Kittens that cannot eat on their own have about a 50% chance of survival, even with the most diligent care. Caring for these itty bitties is a full time job and one not to be taken on lightly. If loosing a kitten is the worst thing you can imagine, do not step up to take on itty bitties – the chances of loosing one is very high.

You will need to focus on three main areas when raising your kittens. You'll want to create a warm, dry, clean and safe environment for them; you will need to feed them the most healthful nutrition you possibly can in the right amounts, and at the right times for their optimal growth and development; and, you will need to provide close attention to all the factors that contribute to giving your kittens the proper overall care. Kittens need love, and a LOT of it!! Without their mother, they look to you for that love, as well as for guidance. A kitten's mother teaches them how to groom themselves, eat from a bowl and use a litter box, without a cat mom to show them the way, you will have to "teach" them to be a cat!

SUPPLIES:

Nesting box/Crate	Syringes
Newspaper	Small bowls, plates, dishes
Paper towels	Formula or ingredients to make your own formula
Unscented baby wipes	Soft canned kitten food
Plenty of old towels and /or blankets	Pedia-lyte
Heating Pad	Meat flavored baby food
Gauze or cotton balls	Canned tuna and/or chicken
Scale	

NESTBOX

The nesting box does not need to be elaborate. It needs to be just big enough for the kittens to move around but not much bigger. Line it with paper towels, newspaper or, if you have a surplus of small receiving style blankets and don't mind doing a lot of laundry, use the blankets. Keep a heating pad under one side of the box only on its lowest setting. The nesting box should stay at about 80 degrees Fahrenheit but no higher. With one side of the box only heated the kitten will be able to crawl away from the heat source if it gets too warm. When using the heating pad, be sure to keep it on the lowest setting, and wrap it well with towels and waterproof pads. Place the box in a draft free location. Be sure the sides of the box are at least six inches tall so the kitten can not fall out. As the babies mature the temperature in the box can be gradually lowered. When the kitten reaches the end of its first month of life it can tolerate room air of 70-75F. The nesting box should have it's bedding changed everyday until the kittens start using a litter box on their own.



FEEDING

- It is easier to start young kittens off using a plastic syringe (without the needle of course!) instead of a small bottle; it's easier to control the flow of the formula and measure how much formula each kitten receives.
- Cover your lap with a towel or old blanket. Take the kitten in your lap, “scruff” it (like it’s mother would do if she were moving him from one place to the next) and slip the end of the syringe into the kitten’s mouth. *Slowly* squeeze the food into the kitten’s mouth.
- Do NOT feed cow’s milk, kittens cannot digest it and feeding them cow’s milk can kill them.
- Do not over feed kittens, as this can bring on diarrhea as well as other problems.
- At 2 weeks old, use a 6 cc. syringe size and feed every 3 hours, and at about 3 weeks old, move them up to a 12 cc. syringe, feeding them at least every 4 hours. (Yes, even through the night)
- An average meal for a 3 week old kitten can vary from a single syringe full (12 fluid cc) to three syringes full (36 fluid cc) for a large and hungry kitten!!
- Use the KMR (Kitten Milk Replacer) formula, available in most large pet and feed supply stores. While the powdered form is more economical, it does not always reconstitute as lump-free as needed to flow through the syringes (best method is to mix a small amount with cold water first, similar to the process of making lump-free gravy, then add the mixture to the rest of the batch). If you shop around, including online, you can find the best price for purchasing the formula.
- The most economical recipe would be the one you make at home:
- At home high calorie “formula” recipes:

FORMULA #1

(avoid if diarrhea is present)

1 can Evaporated Milk

1 egg yolk

2 tablespoons Karo syrup

FORMULA #2

3oz. condensed milk

3oz. water

4oz. plain yogurt (NOT low-fat)

3 large or 4 small egg yolks

- As the kittens grow, the number of feedings and their frequency can be decreased. Also as they grow, they can let you know better when they are actually hungry. Kittens that are not getting enough nourishment may cry continuously, suck on each other or on themselves, and they may have prominent hips or backbones.
- At about 4 weeks of age, start mixing in soft canned food with the formula and offering it in a bowl to begin the weaning process. Continue to syringe feed until you are certain they are eating well on their own. Begin offering hard kitten kibble at this age as well, they may surprise you! Young animals that have been separated from their mothers too soon often lack the instinct to eat from a bowl and need some encouragement.
- Watering food down, heating it up and offering it directly to their lips with your finger or a spoon can sometimes give them the idea. Kittens at or under one pound need to be encouraged to eat at least every four hours and weighed daily to insure weight gain.
- If the kittens do not seem interested in canned kitten food, try canned chicken or tuna. Pouring the liquid from canned chicken or tuna onto other types of food will often work. Add more water to the can, refrigerate it and you’ll have more “juice” ready for next time.
- Chicken, turkey or beef flavored baby food will often be an appealing consistency and flavor to kittens.
- Nutri-Cal is an over the counter calorie supplement that can be added to any of the above recipes to add calories.
- Kayro Syrup can be purchased at any grocery store and can be applied directly to the kitten’s gums or food to add immediate calories and nutrients.

Feeding Guide

Age in Weeks	Average Weight of Kitten	Amount of Formula Per Day	Number of Feedings Per Day
1	4 ounces	32 cc	6
2	7 ounces	56 cc	4
3	10 ounces	80 cc	3
4	13 ounces	104 cc	3
5	1 pound	128 cc	3

Kittens should be weighed frequently to ensure that they are growing properly. You'll soon know if your orphans are thriving because they will grow at an incredible rate.

Helping The Kitten Eliminate

Kittens under 3 weeks of age may need encouragement to eliminate. Normal kitten stools are yellowish brown with a jam-like consistency. After every feeding, gently massage the anus and urinary orifice with a cotton ball or gauze moistened with warm water until they urinate and defecate. Be very gentle when you do this and don't worry if no urine or stool is produced after every feeding. By the time the kitten is three weeks old it should be able to go without your help.

Watery yellowish or greenish stools are sometimes associated with feeding too much. If they occur, try diluting the formula 50-50 with Pedia-Lyte until the stools return to normal consistency. You can also give the kitten 2-3 drops of kapectate just prior to each feeding.

Stools that are clumped and cheese-like are sometimes due to feeding the formula too concentrated. When kittens strain to defecate and pass overly hard stools increase the frequency of feeding and dilute the formula. These impacted kittens also often have a bloated abdomen. You can give them a few drops of mineral oil or cat hairball paste to help them evacuate the stool.

As early as 3 weeks you can start placing the kittens in a litter box after feedings to encourage it to go on it's own.



Developmental Stages

At birth (3 - 4.5 ounces)

- the kitten is born both blind and deaf.
- the eyes are closed and the ears are folded.
- the kitten uses its sense of smell to find its mother's teat.
- a kitten finds its own particular teat on the mother's breast that it uses until it is weaned.
- each teat has its own characteristic scent that the kitten can recognize.
- The mother has to lick the kitten's bottom to stimulate it to eliminate.
- a newborn kitten cannot regulate its own body temperature and it is extremely sensitive to cold.
- a newborn kitten that gets separated from the mother and its siblings can die quickly of hypothermia.

Day 4

- hearing develops but the ear canals are not open completely until the end of the 2nd week.

Day 5

- the remains of the umbilical cord dries up and falls off

Day 11

- eyes begin to open and continue to open until the 13th day.
- all kittens are born with blue eyes but the eye color can change later.

2.5 weeks

- the kitten begins to crawl and starts to stand.

3 weeks

- the kitten is steadier on its feet
- the sense of smell is mature.
- sight is still poor but he can interpret some visual information
- milk teeth begin to develop.
- can eliminate without aid

4 weeks (~1 pound)

- the kitten's sight has improved enough so that it can negotiate obstacles
- developing motor skills – running climbing
- beginning to eat solid (canned) food
- active play with littermates
- it will not be fully sighted until 2 months of age

4 - 5 weeks

- the kitten weighs about one pound.
- it will be moving quite well
- they learn to play with one another
- groom themselves.

5 to 7 weeks

- they can lap up kitten formula and canned food from a shallow dish.
- first signs of predatory behavior occur
- very important social development occurs in relation to humans and other animals, very important for foster homes to provide variety of social experiences

8 weeks (~2 pounds)

- a kitten will have a full set of teeth
- should be fully weaned
- should be eating hard cat food as well as canned food
- play should be highly active, chasing, climbing and tumbling with littermates