

## Kittens !

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### Introduction

Thank you for fostering! You are about to impart on a great journey, molding young life, nurturing those in need and providing a safe, loving home for underage kittens. When kittens come to our shelter weighing less than 2 pounds and we feel they are good adoption candidates, we need to find foster homes willing to take them, help them grow and thrive and keep them until they are big enough and old enough for adoption into their forever home. The veterinary staff draws blood on the kittens (or their mother) to ensure they are free of feline leukemia and feline AIDS. They weigh the kittens and give them two de-wormers. They are now ready to go to their foster home!

### Supplies

- Towels, wash cloths, blankets, unscented baby wipes
- Litter boxes and litter
- Canned and dry kitten food (TLAC provides)
- Bowls for food and water
- Scale
- Toys (cat “mice”, balls, wand toys, etc.)
- Scratching Post(s)
- Humidifier (optional)
- Plain yogurt (with live cultures) (optional)
- Heating pad (optional)



## **Getting Started**

We recommend using a “Starter Room” for the first several days (to a week, depending on the sociability of the kittens). This can be a bathroom, kitchen, spare room or even a large crate if you have one available. Young kittens have accidents so consider that you pick your “Starter Room” in terms of being easy to clean and disinfect as needed. Kittens should always have easy access to food, fresh water and a litter box. Set up a warm soft place for them to sleep that is free of drafts. Make sure they have somewhere to hide that is easily accessible to you (NOT under a king sized bed I found out the hard way!) like a small crate or a cardboard box on it’s side. An inexpensive cardboard scratcher is a terrific way to get getting used to scratching in appropriate places. The kittens should remain in their starter room while you are not available to supervise and over night. While you are available to watch and play with the kittens, let them explore more and more parts of your home as the kittens become braver and braver. Separating the kittens from your own personal pets for 7-10 days is a good idea, while the kittens are screened before leaving the shelter, they could be incubating illnesses that are contagious to you or your pets. No fostered animals should be allowed to mingle with your own pets or outside in your yard for the first two weeks after you bring them home. This is to protect both the foster pets and your own pets from any infectious agents they may bring from the shelter.

## **Feeding**

Young kittens need to eat at least 3 to 4 times a day. Hard food can be left out all the time if it is in an area where other pets in the house do not have access to it – it is important to make sure all kittens are eating regularly. We provide Royal Canin “Baby Cat” formula hard kibble and Purina Pro Plan Kitten formula canned food. Only offer your fosters kitten formula, high quality foods. Never give foster kittens cow’s milk, they cannot digest it. If the kittens do not seem to be eating, try warming up and watering down soft food. You can use commercially produced kitten formula to add calories to wet food. For picky eaters, you can also try canned tuna, chicken or salmon or meat flavored baby food. Occasionally kittens may need to be force fed with a syringe. A kitten that is not eating will deteriorate very rapidly; please arrange to bring the kitten in to TLAC ASAP for veterinary attention.

## **Eliminating**

Most kittens are very eager to go to the bathroom in a litter box. Make sure the litter box has low sides to make it easy for them to get in and out. Your own personal preference for litter type is fine. Young kittens may have accidents. Sometimes they just forget where the litter box is or they have diarrhea that makes it very difficult for them to get to the litter box in time. Like small children new to potty training, they may be so involved in play time that they simply are not willing to stop and find the litter box. These accidents should be cleaned up promptly with an enzyme based cleaner designed for cleaning pet accidents. If not properly cleaned, the area will remain an “alternate bathroom” for the duration of their stay and possibly for any future fosters who enter your home.

## Socialization

Kittens are in your home for a reason – **SOCIALIZATION!!!** Handle them several times a day and especially while they are eating. As they become more acclimated to your home, you can carefully let them explore more areas while you are available to supervise. If you are comfortable with introducing the kittens to your other pets, this can be done now.



**Get them used to all over handling – check their paws, ears and teeth regularly. Introduce them to brushing, ear cleaning and nail clipping.**



Help them learn appropriate ways to play and appropriate things to play with – not your fingers! Rough play (scratching and biting) should NOT be tolerated. If a kitten does become over stimulated, give the kitten an old stuffed toy he can sink his teeth into and kick as much as he likes, but teach them that it is not appropriate to do this to any part of a human's body! There are so many fabulous toys designed for cats – wand toys, laser pointers, balls and stuffed mice are all appreciated. Be careful with any sort of string – kittens can digest it and cause serious bowel obstructions.

*No fostered cats should be allowed to mingle with your own for the first two weeks after you bring them home. This is to protect both the foster cats and your own pets from any infectious agents they may bring from the shelter.*

This is also a great time to introduce the concept of the scratching post, if they go for the furniture, feel free to squirt them with a water bottle and then move them to the scratching post – the kitten's new owner will appreciate it! Try "Squirt Therapy" when a kitten does anything "bad" – tries to get outside, plays too rough, scratches on the furniture, etc



## **Kitten Growth and Development**

Kittens should follow the growth chart below. Of course there will always be slight variations, but keep in mind 1 pound equals 1 month, so by the time they are 8 weeks old, they should be 2 pounds in weight. The kitten needs to be at least two pounds for vaccinations, a microchip and to be spayed. Occasionally we come across a very petite kitten that despite our best efforts, does not reach 2 pounds as soon as we were hoping. If the overall health of the kitten is good, we still make the kitten available for adoption.

### **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 visual information sufficiently in order to locate his mother.
- milk teeth begin to develop.
- can eliminate without the aid of his mother.



**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**

- the mother begins to wean the kittens
- they can lap up kitten formula 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
- will still nurse if the mother will let it
- should be eating hard cat food as well as canned food
- play should be highly active, chasing, climbing and tumbling with littermates

