

Trouble Shooting for Fostering Cats and Kits

There are always risks when fostering young kittens, daily monitoring of their overall health and well being is very important. Some of the most common issues you may have are outlined below.

- Tummy Troubles
- Kitty Colds
- Hair Loss
- Behavior Problems

Tummy Troubles

Tummy Troubles include not eating, diarrhea, vomiting, blood in stool and not using the litter boxes. Of then the cause of Tummy Troubles is simply an immature digestive track but can also be caused by intestinal parasites or bacterial infections.

Not Eating

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 the food provided by the shelter, 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.
- Kitten Formula is available over the counter. It is generally not needed but can be added to any of the above recipes to add fluid and calories. *Do not give kittens cow's milk – it will make tummy trouble worse since they lack the necessary enzymes to digest it.*
- Nutri-Cal is an over the counter calorie supplement that can be added to any of the above recipes to add calories.
- 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

- **Force Feeding:** If kittens are not eating on their own, either due to illness or immaturity, you may need to “force feed” them. Take any of the recipes above and add enough liquid to make it very soupy. Suck up about 5ccs in a syringe. 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. The kitten should get at least 5 ccs every 4-6 hours.

Diarrhea

Loose, watery stools are very common in underage kittens. There are many causes but the most frequent cause is simply an immature digestive track that lacks the proper enzymes to digest commercial cat food.

- **Yogurt** – yogurt contains pro-biotics and enzymes that can help a kitten’s digestive track mature. You can either add it to the food or give it to them straight.
- **Pumpkin** – canned organic pumpkin is extremely high in fiber and some kittens LOVE it.

Very watery diarrhea for more than 24 hours can be an emergency situation for a very small kitten. Make sure the kitten is drinking, check for dehydration several times a day and consult the shelter ASAP if you feel the kitten is fading.

When do I contact the shelter for veterinary attention?

Any one isolated symptom of tummy trouble is usually nothing to worry about, however, if there is more than one symptom or any one symptom is accompanied by lethargy, weight loss or signs of dehydration, veterinary intervention may be needed. If your foster pets display any of the following symptoms – make arrangements to bring them to the shelter ASAP.

- Not eating for more than 24 hours.
- Depressed or unresponsive cat: a slight decrease in activity is expected, but if the cat is much less active than you would expect, contact the shelter
- Vomiting or diarrhea that lasts more than 24 hours

What can I expect the veterinarian to prescribe?

While the cat(s) is at the shelter, a variety of tests and exams may be performed. Once the vet determines the cause of the tummy troubles, appropriate treatments will be prescribed.

- **Forti-Flora** – a powdered form of probiotics and enzymes that can be sprinkled directly on the cat’s food.
- **Antibiotics** – if an infection is suspected, antibiotics will be prescribed
- **De-wormers** – if an intestinal parasite is suspected, anti-parasitic will be prescribed
- **Prescription Diet** – a special high fiber, probiotic formula of cat food may be prescribed

How do I know my foster cats are improving?

- Increased appetite
- Increased activity
- Formed stool
- No vomiting

*If you do not see an improvement in 3-5 days, or if the cats become **MORE** ill than when seen by the shelter veterinarian, arrange for them to come in and be seen again by shelter veterinarian staff.*

Feline Upper Respiratory Infection (URI)

URI is similar to the common cold in humans. It is especially common in cats that have been exposed to a lot of other cats, such as in an animal shelter. URI is rarely fatal and usually resolves in one to three weeks. Treatment generally consists of supportive care. In addition, antibiotics are sometimes given to treat possible bacterial infections. However, although secondary bacterial infections can make the problem worse, the underlying cause is often a viral infection. Viral infections are not cured by antibiotics – as with the common cold, there is no completely effective treatment besides time and allowing the cat's own immune system to do its job.

What are the signs of URI?

- Clear or colored nasal discharge (snot)
- Sneezing
- Red inflamed conjunctiva (lining of the eyes)
- Fever, lethargy, loss of appetite

What can I do to make my foster cat feel better?

What makes you feel better when you have a cold? A warm, quiet, comfy place to rest, chicken soup, orange juice and TLC! Your cat needs the same, with some slight modifications for felines!

- Make sure the cat is eating. When cats get stuffy noses, they can't smell their food very well and may not want to eat. Offer canned food, canned chicken, tuna or salmon, or meat flavored baby food.
- If the cat is producing discharge from eyes or nose, gently clean the cat's nose and eyes with a soft cloth wet with warm water.
- If the cat is very congested, use a humidifier or put the cat in the bathroom and run hot water in the shower for a few minutes a couple of times a day. For a more concentrated steam treatment, put the cat in a carrier next to the sink, cover the carrier and the faucet with a thick towel and run the water on hot for 5-10 minutes. The steam should remain trapped under the towel. A couple of drops of eucalyptus oil in the sink can help as well.
- "Little Noses" is an over the counter decongestant designed for infants that can help kittens too! A drop in each nostril 2 times a day can help.

When do I contact the shelter for veterinary attention?

- Not eating for more than 24 hours.
- Green or yellow discharge from the nose or eyes
- Difficulty breathing, especially panting or breathing through an open mouth
- Depressed or unresponsive cat: a slight decrease in activity is expected, but if the cat is much less active than you would expect, contact the shelter
- Vomiting or diarrhea that lasts more than 24 hours
- Little or no improvement after a week of home supportive care

What can I expect the veterinarian to prescribe?

- If an infection is indicated by fever or green or yellow discharge or other symptoms, the vet may prescribe an antibiotic. Give the antibiotic as directed, until it is gone. Do not stop giving the antibiotic if the cat seems to be getting better, continue as prescribed.
- If eyes are affected by the URI, eye ointment may be prescribed, administer as directed.
- If the cat is especially congested, you may be given a “Nebulization Set Up”. This is box and a nebulizer with a special nebulizing solution. The cats should be “nebbed” at least twice a day for 10 to 20 minutes. If this is prescribed, you will be given special instructions to assist you.

How do I know my fosters are improving?

- Increased appetite
- Increased activity
- Sneezing almost never
- No ocular or nasal discharge

*If you do not see an improvement in 3-5 days, or if the cats become **MORE** ill than when seen by the shelter veterinarian, arrange for them to come in and be seen again by shelter veterinarian staff.*



Kittens getting a breathing treatment called nebulizing to help cure upper respiratory infections.

Hair Loss

Any spots of hair loss on your foster should be reported to the Foster Coordinator immediately. The most common cause of hair loss is a skin fungus called ringworm. Ringworm typically grows on the nose, tail or feet but can crop up anywhere on their body. While ringworm is treatable, the treatment is time consuming, expensive and very labor intensive. Ringworm is also contagious to other people and animals in the home.

Behavior Problems

Most kittens adjust very quickly and easily to live in their new foster home. After a few days of cautiousness and a few hisses and spits at the family dog, the majority of kittens become outgoing, playful and affectionate. If after a few days, the kitten does not seem to be coming out of it's shell, more proactive care must be taken.

Socializing Shy Kittens

- Food is the key to taming. Make dry kitten food available at all times and give the kitten a small amount of wet food at least twice a day. The kitten may hesitate to eat in your presence at first, but be patient. Eventually the kitten will associate your presence with food.
- Chicken-flavored baby food is a special treat that almost no kitten can resist (make sure it doesn't contain onion!).
- Wrap the kitten in a towel, allowing her head to stick out. Offer baby food or wet food on a spoon. If she does not respond, dab a tiny bit on the end of her nose. Once she tastes it, she will soon want more.
- Gently begin to pet the kitten's face, chin, and behind the ears while talking gently. Try to have several feeding/petting sessions (15-20 minutes) with each kitten as many times a day as you can.
- Progress will depend on the kitten's age and temperament. Each day you will notice improvement- falling asleep in your lap, coming towards you for food, meowing at you, purring, and playing are all great signs. Once the kitten no longer runs away from you but instead comes toward you seeking to be fed, held and pet, you can confine her to a small, kitten-proofed room rather than a cage.
- Expose the kittens to a variety of people. Everyone should use low voices at first, and approach the kittens in a non-threatening manner.
- If you do not notice signs of taming after a couple of days, kittens should be separated from each other to facilitate taming. Left together, one kitten can become outgoing and playful while another remains shy and withdrawn. If you cannot separate them, the kittens can be housed together, but be sure to spend time alone with each one. Siblings can be reunited when they have begun to show regular signs of socialization.
- Once the kitten is willing to play, offer toys and use a string (not yarn) or a cat dancer for him to chase. Do not let the kitten bite, scratch or play with your hand.
- If the kittens are staying awake at night, try to play and socialize with them more during the day and cover their cage(s) at night with a towel or blanket.
- Leave a television or radio on (not too loud) during the day so the kittens get used to human voices.
- If you are confining the kittens in a kennel, try to keep it in the most active part of your house (family room, kitchen, etc.) This way, the kittens can get used to the regular noises and activities of a household, which will help with socialization.

Rough Play

- Provide a variety of toys for your kittens so you can determine their preferences. In general, cats seem to enjoy batting at small toys, like balls and fake mice. They also like to stalk, chase and pounce on things that move like prey, such as toys with feathers attached to flexible rods that you can dangle and move about.
- Frequently give your kittens new objects to investigate, such as paper bags or cardboard boxes.
- If your kittens tend to grab your feet as you go up and down the stairs or hide under things and ambush your ankles or legs as you walk by, carry toys with you and toss them ahead of you to redirect his attention. Try to get him to focus on chasing the toys instead of attacking you.
- Consistently give a too rough kitten “time-outs” when he plays too roughly. The instant he starts to bite or scratch you, end the game by leaving the room. Don’t attempt to pick up your cat and put him in another room for the time-out as this could provoke more bites.

What NOT to Do

- Never encourage your kitten to play with your hands, feet or any other body part. While it may be fun when you have a tiny kitten, it becomes painful and dangerous as the kitten grows up.
- Do not use toys that teach your cat to play with your hands, such as gloves with balls hanging from the fingers. If you do, your cat will be encouraged to direct his play at your hands and won’t understand that it’s only okay to attack your hands when you’re wearing the toy gloves.
- Do not physically punish your cat for rough play. If you hit or slap your cat, he may perceive your actions as play and become even rougher. Alternatively, he might become fearful of your hands and respond by avoiding you or changing from play to real aggression.
- Never run from your cat or try to block his movements with your feet. These actions can cause your cat to intensify his play or become aggressive.



Destructive Scratching

The best tactic when dealing with scratching is not to try to stop your cat from scratching, but instead to teach her where and what to scratch. An excellent approach is to provide her with appropriate, cat-attractive surfaces and objects to scratch, such as scratching posts. The following steps will help you encourage your cat to scratch where you want her to.

- Provide a variety of scratching posts with different qualities and surfaces. Try posts made of cardboard, carpeting, wood, sisal and upholstery. Some cats prefer horizontal posts. Others like vertical posts or slanted posts. Some prefer a vertical grain for raking, while others favor a horizontal grain for picking. Once you figure out your cat's preference for scratching, provide additional posts of that kind in various locations. Keep in mind that all cats want a sturdy post that won't shift or collapse when used. Most cats also like a post that's tall enough that they can stretch fully. (This may be why cats seem to like drapes so much!)
- Encourage your cat to investigate her posts by scenting them with catnip, hanging toys on them and placing them in areas where she'll be inclined to climb on them.
- Discourage inappropriate scratching by removing or covering other desirable objects. Turn speakers toward the wall. Put plastic, double-sided sticky tape, sandpaper or upside-down vinyl carpet runner (knobby parts up) on furniture or on the floor where your cat would stand to scratch your furniture. Place scratching posts next to these objects, as "legal" alternatives.
- If you catch your cat *in the act* of scratching an inappropriate object, you can try startling him by clapping your hands or squirting him with water. Use this procedure only as a last resort, because your cat may associate you with the startling event (clapping or squirting) and learn to fear you.

