

Bottle Feeding & Care of Orphaned Kittens

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You found kittens.... Now what?

- ◉ Don't jump to the rescue just yet...
 - > Watch from a distance – mom may have gone out for a bite to eat
 - Best chance of survival is with mom!!
 - Are they clean, plump and sleeping quietly in a heap? Are they dirty and crying continuously?
 - > Don't touch or move them
 - > Are they in immediate danger?
 - > If mom has not returned after 12-24 hours or if the kittens are in poor health/injured, pick them up and care for them



Orphan Kittens

- Shelters are flooded with kittens from late March/early April through the end of fall (and sometimes later)
- If you find orphan kittens, be prepared to care for them
- Orphan kittens cannot be cared for in shelters – they require round-the-clock care
- They are at risk in traditional shelters

Determining Age

- Newborns – 3.5 oz at birth
- Umbilical stump falls off by 3 days after birth
- Kittens get front teeth at 3-4 weeks and then back teeth at 5-6 weeks
- Excellent Kitten Progression Guide (alleycat.org)
 - Age DOES NOT determine feeding amounts
 - Size and weight should guide feeding amounts

What Supplies Do You Need?



Preparing the Nest



- Kittens need the nest to be very warm (around 90 degrees)
- Place two towels/fleece on top of the heat source
- Place a baby blanket in the nest for kittens to burrow in
- Leave half nest without a heat source so kittens can get away from heat
- Do not place anything on top of the kittens

Assess the Health of the Kittens

- Healthy Kittens

- > Cry just a little
- > Squirm around a bit
- > Eat and sleep a lot
- > Gain weight



- Sick Kittens

- > Inactive
- > Cry a lot
- > May not eat much
- > Look not quite right



- Any doubt – see a veterinarian!!!

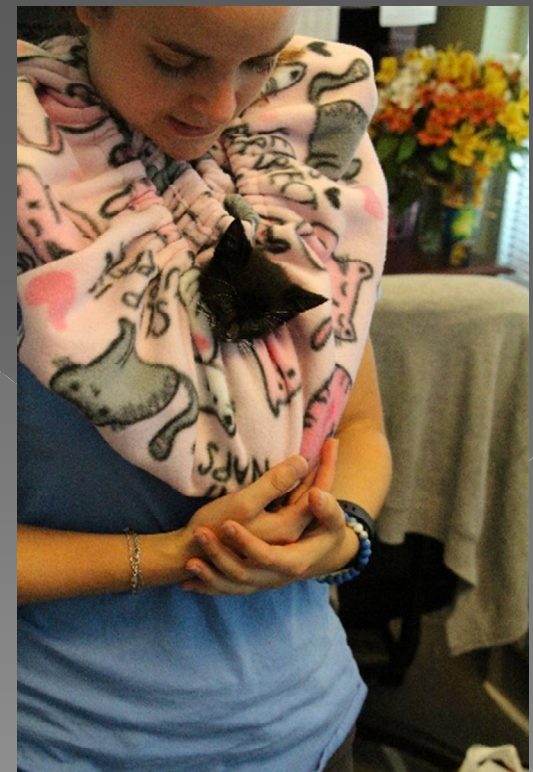
Assess the Health of the Kittens

- Neonatal kittens are vulnerable to:
 - > Hypothermia
 - > Dehydration
 - > Diarrhea
 - > Hypoglycemia
 - > Flea anemia



Warmth!!

- ◉ Restoring and maintaining warmth
- ◉ Put the kitten in your shirt for easy, gradual warming
- ◉ Gradual warming is a must!! Never feed a cold kitten!!
- ◉ If ears/paw pads feel cool, kitten is hypothermic



Fleas

- Check for fleas

- > Look on regions with sparse fur for presence of fleas
- > Comb the back near base of tail to collect flea dirt dander using a flea comb. Tap comb on wet paper towel. If the dirt flashes red, that is evidence of blood – fleas
- > If infested with fleas, they can die from anemia

Flea Bath for Neonates

- Young kittens should get a “bird bath” version of a flea bath
- Use a flea comb to comb out fleas and immediately dip them into a solution of soapy dishwater to remove and kill fleas. It kills fleas near instantly.
- Do this in an isolated area where jumping fleas will not enter the environment.
- If you continue to have issues with fleas, consult a vet
- Topical treatment is not appropriate for neonates
- There are many dangers in trying to give a neonate a full flea bath

Bottle-feeding kittens



Overview

1. Use a nipple trimmed to appropriate size for each kitten's size
2. Use hot water to sterilize the bottle & nipple
3. If using powdered kitten formula, prepare formula according to label instructions
4. Warm up the formula and test the temperature on wrist
5. Warm up the nipple
6. Weigh the kitten
7. Bottle-feed the kitten
8. Burp the kitten
9. Stimulate the genitals so the kitten can urinate and defecate
10. Clean and dry the kitten
11. Place the kitten back into the warm, dry nest for observation



Nursing Bottles & Nipples

- Different kinds of bottles
- More important is shape of the nipple
- Trimming the nipple
 - > Pinch nipple and trim off the tip
 - > Start very small
 - > Unscrew nipple and make sure you can see through the hole
 - > Make hole just big enough to allow formula to slowly drip from nipple when bottle is inverted
 - > Use one bottle and nipple for each litter
- Sterilize bottles and nipples

Kitten Milk Replacer (KMR)

- ◉ Comes in powdered or pre-mixed in cans
- ◉ Do not switch back and forth between powdered and canned (will cause diarrhea)
- ◉ Do not give the kittens cow's milk
- ◉ Powdered formula is generally recommended
 - > It can be reconstituted with specific quantities of water or unflavored Pedialyte
- ◉ Once opened, both the powder and the canned need refrigerated
 - > Canned must be used within 72 hours of opening
 - > Powder can be refrigerated for up to 3 months or frozen for up to 6 months
 - > Reconstituted liquid must be used within 24 hours

Proper Positioning

- Raising his head back may cause aspiration, which can be fatal
- Kitten should be feet down/head straight
- Never feed a kitten on his back like a human baby
- Never hold the kitten in the air while feeding
- Kitten should be manipulating the suction – do not squeeze or force formula into his mouth



Bottle Feeding

- ◉ Warm up bottle – place in cup of hot water
- ◉ Don't put bottle in microwave (toxins from plastic may leak into milk)
- ◉ Test temperature – squeeze drops on wrist – should feel warm not hot
- ◉ Shake bottle to mix up any hot spots
- ◉ If needed, hold the kitten's head gently in position

Bottle Feeding

- ◉ Put nipple in side of mouth then center it, let kitten position
- ◉ Kitten should control suction – do not squeeze or force formula into his mouth
- ◉ Squeeze a few drops out – then stop – should feel kitten latching on
- ◉ You will likely see ears pulsing with each swallow and tiny air bubbles may appear in the bottle

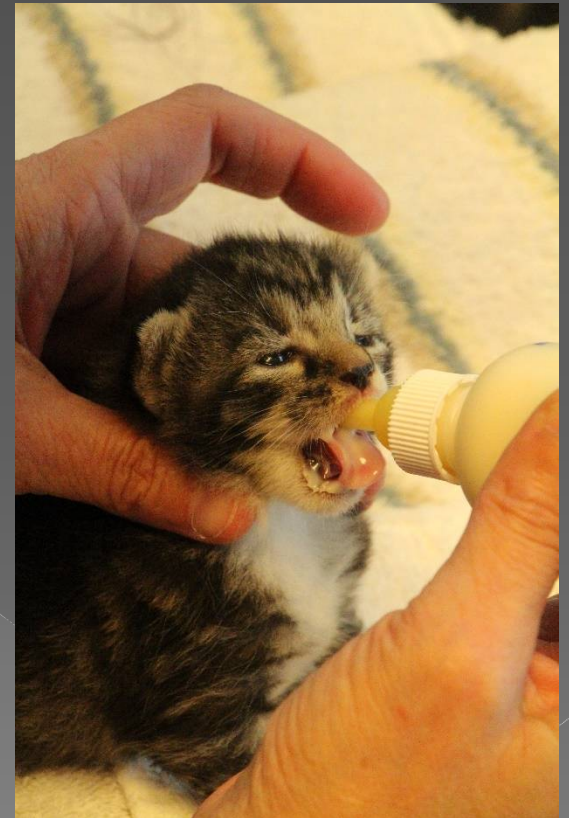
Kitten Won't Latch On

- Kitten may not understand what the bottle is and may roll nipple on tongue
 - > Very different feel from mom!
- Brace face with heel of palm and fingers, don't let him move head around
- Try again and squeeze a few drops of milk out
- A lot of kittens will get it on the second try
- If you are still having difficulty getting the kitten to latch on/eat, see a veterinarian as kitten may require syringe feeding



When & How Much To Feed

- Refer to Feeding Chart
- If kittens are very small or weak, feed every two hours
- Once stabilized (nursing well, no diarrhea), feed every three hours
- Again, do not overfeed
- Feed at evenly spaced intervals, around the clock
- Consistency is key
- Burp kittens after every feeding
 - › Hold kitten upright against your shoulder or place one hand under his belly and gently pad and rub his back



Stimulate to Eliminate

- ◉ Kittens should pee almost every time after you feed them
 - > No urine produced after 12 hours – see vet immediately
- ◉ Kittens usually poop at least once a day, but kittens can vary
 - > Take to vet if they don't poop for more than 2 days

Stimulate to Eliminate

- Supplies needed
 - > Cup of warm water
 - > Toilet paper, gauze pads, cotton balls



How to Stimulate

- ◉ Immediately after feeding –
 - > Turn on side
 - > Wet the toilet paper or gauze pad with warm water and squeeze it dry
 - > Stimulate the genitals by rubbing in one direction like mom would
 - > Do not rub back & forth – friction is irritating
 - > Keep up until all urination stops (bladder is empty)
 - > After bladder is empty, offer more formula
 - > If he does not latch on, he is full and done feeding

Normal vs. Abnormal

	Normal	Abnormal
Urine:		
Color	Pale yellow	Dark
Odor	No odor	Pungent (strong)
Stool:		
Color	Yellowish/brown	White or green
Consistency	Toothpaste	Diarrhea, Bloody diarrhea, Blood in stool

Tips:

- White stool is a sign of malabsorption, a serious problem
- Formed green stool may indicate an infection that needs to be treated by an antibiotic
- Green or yellowish watery stool may be from overfeeding
- Dark, pungent-smelling urine is a sign of dehydration
- A kitten's stool will get darker once he starts to eat wet food (done with formula)

Clean the Kittens

- ◉ Clean the kittens up with a damp wash cloth or gauze pad or use baby wipes (need to be unscented)
- ◉ Dry thoroughly with a towel
- ◉ Place kittens back in warm, dry, clean nest



Tip: Simulating Mom

You can use a toothbrush to simulate mom's grooming tongue!!

Monitoring the Kittens

- Neonates should gain about 4 oz. per week
- Should gain about 1 pound per month until about 6 months old
- Weigh neonates at the same time each day (before feeding preferably) using a kitchen, baby, or postage scale
- Keep a log and if neonates are losing ounces over more than a day, bring them to a vet

Illness & Disease

- Upper Respiratory Infection
- Herpes & Calici Virus
- Coccidia
- Giardia
- Diarrhea
 - > Can be life threatening!!!
- Feline Panleukopenia (Feline Distemper) Virus

Fading Kitten Syndrome

- Set of symptoms that cause a neonatal kitten to fail to thrive
- It is a series of life-threatening symptoms in which a kitten's health quickly declines and may lead to death without immediate intervention
- Learn the signs, monitor for symptoms, and have a plan so you know where to go for help
- Do not wait until the kitten is in crisis to take action

Fading Kitten Syndrome

- Emergency symptoms
 - > Pale gums
 - > Extreme lethargy
 - > Odd vocalizations
 - > Muscle wasting – loss of muscle tone in face and body causing kitten to look gaunt or frail
 - > Decreased interest in food
 - > Loss of weight
 - > Dehydration
 - > Hypothermia

Mortality Rate of Orphan Kittens

- Very young kittens may not survive without a mother no matter how good the care. It is important to understand that the odds of a young kitten (under 6 weeks) surviving on its own without a mother present are very low.
- Although the mortality rate can be quite high, you are giving the kitten its best chance at a long and healthy life.

Deworming and Vaccination

- Kittens can be dewormed as young as two weeks and will need multiple dewormings. See your vet for the proper medication and dosing.
 - › Young kittens are very sensitive to medication – always check with vet first before giving any medication
- Routine vaccinations should start around 6 weeks of age for most kittens. Consult your vet to discuss proper timing for your particular kittens.

Immune System

- Kittens get initial immune system from mom's colostrum within the first 16 hours after birth which protects them for many weeks
 - > No substitute for mom's colostrum
 - > Probiotics can help with GI problems
- Kittens start to make own antibodies at about 4 weeks of age.
 - > Orphaned kittens most vulnerable to diseases from birth to 6 weeks of age.
 - > Best taken care of in your home and away from other cats

Weaning Kittens

- ◉ Start weaning process at 4 weeks of age
- ◉ Put formula in a shallow bowl (low sides)
- ◉ It is messy – kittens may first eat in the bowl, not from it
- ◉ Start leaving out fresh water at same time



Introducing the Litter Box

- Introduce litter box between 3 and 4 weeks of age
- Use a small cardboard box with just enough litter to cover the bottom
- Use a natural litter (corn or wheat) in case they ingest any
- Put the kittens in the box, allowing them to get the feel
- Within a few days, most kittens will start using the box

Love and Attention

- ◉ Emotional and physical closeness to you is as important as food and warmth
- ◉ Pet the kitten often, letting him snuggle
- ◉ Playing with the kitten with a variety of toys is also important
 - > Helps them develop motor skills and bond to you
 - > Do not use your hands as toys
- ◉ Once the kittens are about 5-6 weeks old and healthy, let them interact with other people as well



