



FOSTERING: Bottle Babies

Housing * Food * Feeding * Elimination * Baths * Weaning * Death

For any topic covered here or for questions about something not listed, please contact the Foster Coordinator at (707) 576-7999 x 218 or Foster/Adoption Manager at (707) 576-7999 x 212

Housing

Please house bottle babies in a cat carrier or box in a safe, warm, secure place. Make a nest for them using soft, warm blankets. Kittens cannot control their body temperature for the first four weeks of life. Place a heating pad on LOW covered by a towel and then a blanket in the bottom of the carrier. Be certain there is a portion of the carrier where the baby can move off the heating pad if it becomes too warm. If you are fostering a single baby, place a stuffed animal in the carrier so it has something to snuggle up against.

Change bedding often to keep the environment clean. Be sure to remove wet and/or soiled bedding as soon as possible.

Avoid sudden changes in temperature and keep disturbances to a minimum. Although kittens will need to be socialized, they also need lots of sleep, especially for the first three weeks.

Food

One-two week old kittens need to be fed approximately every two to three hours (day & night). For weeks three- four, the kittens may be fed every 3-6 hours during the day, slowly increasing the time between feedings at night.

Feed only a kitten milk replacer, (**KMR**). The powdered form is recommended. Follow mixing instructions on the container. The formula is given at body temperature, (never cold) through a nursing bottle. Make up only enough formula to last 24 hours. Refrigerate unused portions and warm before feeding.

The formula should be warmed to body temperature before feeding. This may be done by placing the nursing bottle in a mug of hot water. Be sure to test the temperature by dispensing a few drops on your wrist. NEVER feed cold formula. Always refrigerate unused formula, including the dry powder. *Never feed cow's milk.*

The nipple of the bottle may need to be enlarged. Use a small pair of scissors to snip a small portion off at the end of the nipple. Milk should ooze from the nipple. Never squeeze the bottle while it is in the kitten's mouth. It can go down into their lungs and cause pneumonia. Squeeze out a drop just before placing it in the kitten's mouth. It is best to feed the kitten on his tummy as opposed to on his back with his head elevated. The kitten should naturally suckle.

Feeding

Follow recommended feeding amounts as directed on the **KMR** instructions. All feeding equipment must be kept scrupulously clean.

If you have a scale available, keep a daily log of kitten's weight. A steady weight gain of 10 grams or 1/3 ounce per day and a normal stool are indications you are feeding the correct amount.

Kittens may have a bit of trouble adjusting to the bottle. This is simply a matter of persistence. You must keep offering the bottle and they will learn that this is where food comes from.

Elimination

The kitten's natural mother takes care of both ends of her baby. By licking the kitten's abdomen, she stimulates the bowels and bladder and tidies up the resulting waste. A surrogate cat mom should gently rub the kitten's abdomen and bottom with a cotton ball or washcloth moistened with warm water. This stimulates the discharge of waste and keeps babies clean. Repeat this process several times a day. They cannot eliminate without help until they are three to four weeks old.

Kitten stools are a great source of information. Normal stool is yellow-brown and pasty. Watch carefully for any changes as kittens often do not "act sick" until they are extremely ill. Loose or watery stools give you clues to illness. Consult a veterinarian as soon as possible if watery stools.

Baths

Without mother's tongue to wash them down, daily cleaning from you is essential. With a warm washcloth, wipe them down after every feeding. Use short strokes as the mother would use with her tongue. This cleans their fur, teaches them to clean their fur, and gives them a feeling of wellbeing. Dry kitten's fur thoroughly and place immediately back in warm bedding. Young kittens can't regulate their own body temperature!

Weaning

At about four weeks of age kittens will start chewing on the nipple and showing a need for more substantial food. Continue to bottle feed but offer less than their full amount. Make up a mixture of softened Purina Kitten Chow and formula as their first solid meal. Make the dry kitten kibble soft by adding hot or warm water to it and allow it to sit for 10 minutes to absorb the moisture. Then using a fork, mix it up adding a sprinkling of kitten milk replacer to create a soupy mixture or gruel. Place kitties in front of the food bowl. If they don't lick on their own, place a bit of food on the tip of your finger and offer it to them. If they still don't lick, open their mouth, and place the food from your finger on the roof of their mouth. This will give them a taste of the food. Now offer them food from your finger again and eventually lead them with your finger closer and closer to the bowl. When they're ready, they'll lap it up. Keep trying until they get it down. Over several days decrease the amount of formula added until they are eating the softened food straight. During this time add a dish of dry food and water and always have it available.

Kittens four to five weeks old need 3-4 small meals a day with the last meal just before bedtime. Kittens six weeks plus need two meals a day (about one-two tablespoons of softened food per kitten for each meal) plus free choice dry kibble. Monitor to be sure each kitten is eating.

See Kitten Care Guide for tips on general care, litter, bedding, illness, socialization and hazards.

Death

Kittens do occasionally die. Once they start to fade, they can go very quickly. As soon as you see anything that is amiss, consult a veterinarian. They can be born with congenital defects, may have had inadequate nutrition during pregnancy, infectious diseases or may have been exposed too long to the elements, etc. This is an upsetting experience for everyone involved, especially when we have worked so hard to save their lives. Know that without your help they would never have even had a chance.