



Fostering Kittens



(Adapted from San Clemente/Dana Point Animal Services)

GETTING STARTED

You will need the following supplies to get started:

Heating pad (if cool weather or under 6 week olds)

Kitten milk formula

Cat carrier

Towels and sheepskin

Stool sample containers

Kitchen weight scale (oz or GMs)

Pet nursing bottle (if not eating on their own)

Cotton balls and gauze pads

Small metal flea comb (if too young for Advantage)

Some other items that would help if you have them:

Room thermometer

Baby rectal thermometer & K-Y to lubricate

Cat/kitten nail clippers

Environment

1. Keep kittens in a draft free area that is easily accessible to you but not your own pets. Make sure that an air conditioning duct or heat vent is not directly overhead.
2. It is advisable to keep your pets separated from new kittens as their background is unknown and they could pass disease to your pets. Always wash your hands after handling kittens.
3. Use a cat carrier, cardboard box or your bathtub to limit their access to your home.
4. Always have a heating pad set on **LOW** under several layers of towels to simulate the heat they would receive from their mother. Wrap the towel around the heating pad so that they won't burn if they manage to get caught underneath the pad. Never use a heating pad at any level other than LOW. The heat can actually burn their skin.
5. Always provide enough space around the heating pad so that they can regulate their own temperature by crawling away from the heat source when they get too warm. About 3 to 6 inches on each side is enough.
6. Pans of water set around the room helps to keep the humidity level higher as the heating pad tends to dry them out. Keep pans of water at a safe, inaccessible area away from the kittens.
7. A piece of the sheepskin will let them suck on it instead of each other, and keep them warmer. Placing a lengthwise rolled up towel in a crescent shape around them helps them cuddle up as they would with Mom. Change the bedding frequently to keep clean and dry.
8. At age 0 - 7 days, the temperature in their carrier should be between 88-92 degrees.

At 7 - 14 days, the carrier temperature should be 80 - 85 degrees

At 28 days the temperature can be slightly cooler (75 - 80 degrees) and by 35 days the carrier can be at room temperature (70 degrees). A kitten which is too cold will cry continuously even during sleep.



FEEDING



1. Kittens require formula that resembles their mother's milk. Cow's milk is too low fat and can cause diarrhea. There are many brands on the market such as Just Born, KMR, Kittylac and Nuturall. We will supply you with ready-to-use Milk Replacer formula. They need to be fed by a special bottle designed for kittens (which we will also supply). For additional supplies check with your local pet store. Just Born formula must be kept refrigerated and will stay good for 14 days after opening. KMR will go bad after 72 hours, so carefully check it before feeding the kittens. After each use, wash the bottle, nipple, & bowls in hot soapy water, and rinse thoroughly (soap left on can make them ill).

2. Formula should be room temperature or warmer. You can warm the formula by placing it in a cup filled with hot water. Always test the formula on your wrist as you would for a baby. If you do microwave it, shake thoroughly, as it may create pockets of hot and warm milk. Be very careful it has no hot pockets before feeding.

3. Place the kitten on its belly and up against a rolled up towel. This is similar to the position they are in when they suckle their mom and gives them something to knead on,

4. Gently slip the nipple into its mouth. Slightly pull the bottle up and away from the kitten to encourage sucking. A healthy and hungry kitten will suck vigorously once they test the milk.

5. When a kitten is extremely tiny or weak, hold the kitten more vertically and use a syringe that has a long, thin nipple attached and very slowly push some formula through the nipple. Careful! If they aspirate into their lungs it could be deadly.

6. It helps to do at least two rotations at feeding time to ensure each one is full. Their bellies should be round, but not stretched to the limit. Most kittens will regulate their intake and you should see steady weight gain in each one.

7. **Never** place a kitten on its back to drink. **Never** squirt formula into a kitten's mouth. If formula comes out the nose, the hole may be too large and the flow of milk too fast. This can cause fluid to get into the lungs and may lead to serious complications.

8. Orphan kittens should probably be gently burped after each feeding to relieve gas; however they usually manage to burp on their own.

9. Generally, kittens will cry when hungry and sleep when not. Kittens should be hungry at each feeding.

10. If a kitten misses one feeding, it may be in trouble. If it misses two feedings then dehydration may occur and you need to contact a Vet. A constantly crying kitten is an indication something is wrong (remember, check to make sure the kitten is not cold).

11. A kitten aged 0 - 7 days should be fed every 3 to 4 hours, A four ounce kitten would require approximately 2 tbs. in a 24 hour period. They have very little body fat to keep them warm, and do not have the ability to shiver until 14 days, so a warm, dry environment is essential.

12. A kitten aged 7 - 14 days should be fed at least 4 to 6 times per day. Some kittens may begin to cut their teeth between 2 - 3 weeks of age.

13. A kitten aged 14 to 21 days should have tripled their birth weight by day 21. They should have their eyes open and be up on their feet. You can introduce solid foods at this time. There are many ways to do this. You can try adding a small amount of baby food (chicken, turkey, lamb) (**NOT GERBERS** - it has onions which causes anemia in kittens) into the formula bottle. Or mix into a gruel of this and let them lick it off your finger. Then guide their head to the saucer slowly and gently. This encourages them to learn to lap and the next step is eating on their own! Gradually add more and more wet food to the formula mixture. In place of baby food, you can try some canned AD. Offer this at least four times a day, and let them eat all they want. They cannot hold as much in their tummy as they are burning up, just like human newborns.



14. Do not leave the saucer in with the kittens for more than 1 hour. This encourages eating when food is presented to them, and also makes it easier to monitor how much each kitten eats.

15. Anything you do should be done slowly and monitored closely. Usually the kittens will take to food when they are hungry. In nature, the transition from milk to meat is not set at a clear date; the kittens will suckle as long as mom lets them.

16. You can supplement food feedings with formula bottles. It's when a kitten recognizes the bottle and holds out for it that you have created a monster! Some are ready early, some take a while.

17. At about 28 days most kittens are ready for dry food to break in those sharp little teeth. They will still rely on the wet food combo for feedings, but change it over gradually to less and less formula, and change to the canned Science Diet Growth. It is much better for them than the baby food (which is mostly water) or the AD. As soon as they are eating, try to get them onto just the canned and dry Growth. Keep clean water available for them. At this point they will be running around, climbing up and playing like maniacs. Enjoy!

18. At 35 days, they should be eating wet food, drinking lots of water and occasionally munching on the dry food.

19. If the kittens are having loose stools when eating the dry food, and several stool samples are negative, you may need to switch from Science Diet to Iams Kitten. Some kittens do better on Science Diet, some on Iams.

20. Kittens 5 to 6 weeks old need six small (approximately a level teaspoon) meals a day. Feeding them their last meal just before bedtime is good. They usually eat and go right to sleep.

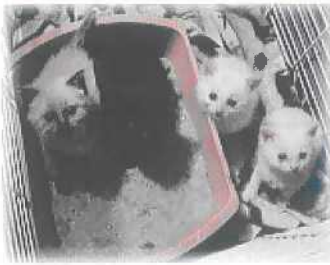
21. Kittens 6 to 8 weeks need four meals a day (about one eighth of a small can) and free choice of dry food.

20. All kittens off the bottle need water available at all times.



LITTERBOX TRAINING

1. Until the kitten is eating regular food, it is not able to defecate or urinate without your help. Mom Cat would lick them. You need to stimulate the kitten to urinate and defecate. Moisten a cotton ball or gauze pad with a small amount of warm water and gently massage the genital and anal area in a slow circular motion. If the anal area is reddened, a little mineral oil will soothe the area.
2. Place the kitten in a standing position on ground, table, counter, or lap. They are afraid of being held up high.
3. All kittens should urinate at each feeding and perhaps only defecate once per day.
4. Place a small litter box (we will supply you with cardboard trays) filled with a very small amount of standard litter in their area at around 2 or 3 weeks, or earlier (with no litter) if they are going on their own.
5. **DO NOT USE SCOOPABLE OR POWDERY LITTER!!!** I can't emphasize this enough. It has been found to turn to cement in their tiny intestines, and may completely block them. Powdery litter can clog their nose and block their breathing. Wait until the cat is grown to change over to this type of litter.



6. The transition from you doing their toilet duties to using the litterbox can take awhile, but once they figure it out, it's home free. Placing a cotton ball soaked with their urine in the box will help them find the litterbox. Take them to the litterbox after feeding and gently scratch their paws in the litter.

7. Make sure the litter is changed as often **as** you can (every time they use it if possible) and that each kitten is actually using it.

CLEANING

1. Depending on the size and condition of the kittens, this may be a full-time job. If the kittens have fleas, you need to shampoo them with a small amount of mild soap and use a flea comb to get those nasty fleas. Flea anemia is deadly in young kittens. Make sure you get them all. Comb, comb, comb! It also helps bond the kittens to you.
2. If the kittens are a little older (5 weeks or so and over 1 lb.) and infested with fleas, you can use a topical flea treatment. *If you have not done this before*, we prefer you bring them to the shelter and we will apply it. We apply a much smaller amount for kittens than for cats. Remember, they suck on each other, so keep the kittens separate from each other for at least 2 hours after application. No other flea treatment should be used for a minimum of 30 days.
3. Sometimes the kittens are so tiny or weak that even a bath may upset their heating system. Make sure the water is elbow temperature and that they get dried off thoroughly. Don't use a blow dryer on them as this dries them out. Towel dry is best. It helps if they still have a heating pad under them as they will huddle on it until they are completely dry.
4. Most often you can just dunk their rear ends in warm water to clean them off when needed. A warm damp washcloth to wipe them off helps simulate how mom would clean them up. Hats off to a mother cat who keeps her kittens clean – it's not easy! Keep them as clean as possible; dried food will take skin off if left too long.

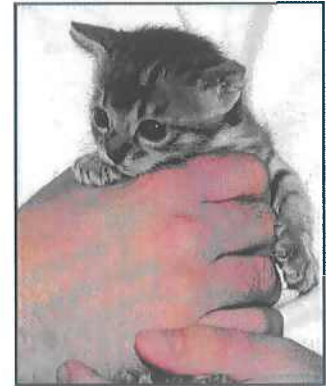


SOCIALIZATION

Socializing a kitten is great fun and an important aspect of foster care. A well socialized kitten finds a home faster than one that hides in the back of his cage.

Newborn to four week old kittens should be handled daily by the foster parent, but only for short periods of time. Kittens this age are easily fatigued. At four weeks of age they will come to you for attention.

Foster parents that have semi-feral kittens have an even greater challenge. These kittens can usually be socialized, but only with daily handling. Sometimes, they will hiss and spit when you attempt to pick them up. Gently pick them up and hold them close to your body, giving them a sense of security. Speak softly as you pet them. Encourage them to lick food from your fingers if they are old enough to eat. This works great to draw them to you. They need plenty of assurance and attention.



DO NOT give them a room in which they can hide from you. They need a box or crate in which to feel secure, but you must have access to them at all times. They will not become socialized unless they are handled many times a day. They need to become accustomed to the sights and sounds of a working home. Go in their room and talk while having your coffee, or read to yourself out loud in their area. This must be done consistently.

TIPS/NOTES

There may be times that you will need to separate the kittens from each other.

1. When they are very young and look alike it may be hard to distinguish between each one. Sometimes you can write a number on the belly with a non-toxic pen.
2. They may hurt each other by suckling on each other's anatomy (specifically, their butts). This is really hard to monitor and keep the offender from damaging the other kitten.
3. When necessary, use a temporary partition between them when you are not there, but always let them socialize with each other. Feeding the sucker first will help as that kitten will tend not to suck when full. The person who invents a kitten pacifier should win a Nobel Prize.
4. If the stool is runny or the urine is dark or smelly, the formula may be too rich. You can add small amounts of water to dilute the formula. Do not dilute more than 50% as the kitten will not receive enough nutrients. You may have to switch formula, but the kitten should be seen by a Vet to determine this. Most kitten stool will be firm, maybe the consistency of pudding, not hard, and yellow to brown in color.
5. When the kittens start playing, be sure you teach them to play gently. If they begin to bite and be too rough, put them back in their bed and leave alone. Never hit a cat. It teaches it to be mean and fight back. Don't teach them to be aggressive with rough play. Remember that "Hands are for loving, and toys are for playing". Put a toy in your hand to play; never let them attack your hands.

SIGNS OF TROUBLE

1. Runny eyes or nose, sneezing or coughing could indicate a respiratory infection. Call the shelter for the Vet on call, and arrange an appointment as soon as possible.
2. After seeing a Vet, if the nose is so stuffy they are having trouble breathing, you can buy Pediatric Nose Drops and use a drop in one side of the nose several times a day for three days, then switch to the other side to prevent a rebound effect. If you need it over 6 days, see the Vet again. Ask the pharmacist for the mildest formula. (Little Noses is one I use)
3. Diarrhea could indicate an infection or parasite. If the formula has been adjusted and the stool is still runny, and maybe smelly, take a stool sample to the Vet on call. If negative, but still having problems, take a second sample. Some parasites are hard to see, and may not be shedding all the time.
4. Don't ever wait over 24 hours to get help. Diarrhea can cause dehydration quickly and they need to see a Vet before this occurs. You can use Pediatric electrolytes liquid (unflavored) to help keep them hydrated. We have found this very helpful. Don't leave out long, and refrigerate any extra. It doesn't keep long (24 hours) so we prefer the powder. You can make up small amounts easily. Use this to mix their formula instead of plain water.
5. If diarrhea is persisting, and the kittens are being treated, you can also add a little Achidopholis to the formula. This is the active culture found in Yogurt, and simulates the mothers good bacteria she would be giving the kittens in her milk. This can be found in Health food stores, or they also carry it occasionally now at Pet stores. It doesn't last too long (its a liquid which must be refrigerated).
6. If the kitten is over 3 weeks old, another trick to help is add a little canned pumpkin to the canned food or bottle. We have found this has enough fiber to help. This isn't in place of treatment, but sometimes the Albon or Flagyl takes awhile to help, and this makes the kitten more comfortable. Infant rice cereal could also be used.
7. See a Vet if the kitten refuses formula and will not eat, or if it is constantly crying, or appears to be in pain.
8. Gasping for air and limp body are very bad signs. Wheezing or lack of coordination are also signs of serious complications. Pale gums could mean flea anemia or other problems. See a Vet.
9. Some kittens may be born with a cleft palate or other birth defect. If you see any abnormalities, contact a Vet.
10. Some kittens are not meant to survive. Mother Nature often seems harsh. There may be times that a kitten seems fine at one feeding and is dead the next. There is a "failure to thrive" syndrome that is not uncommon in cats. Try not to blame yourself and to take it in stride. Sometimes it helps to meet with other foster moms, as anyone doing this often will be able to help you realize it isn't your fault, and you gave them the only chance they would have had. In the event that the kitten should die please return it to the shelter.

DEVELOPMENT

All kittens may vary greatly from the numbers listed below, but this is a general guideline. Keep track of your kittens development on your daily log we will provide. Be sure they do not lose weight. Towards the end of this document you can find a good weight chart from the Marin Shelter.

- AT BIRTH: Weight 2-4 ounces/Born blind and deaf/Heat receptor in nose helps find Mom/Umbilical cord will drop off at around 2 days/Unable to shiver/Can crawl with tummy on ground/No teeth.

- 7 - 14 DAYS: Eyes open but cloudy/Ears should open/Cannot retract claws/Use tail as rudder for stability/Still dragging tummy to crawl/Should weigh 4-8 oz./No teeth.

- 14 - 21 DAYS: Can support body weight on legs/Still needs tail for balance/Can lift one paw at a time/Body weight could be triple birth weight.

- 21 - 28 DAYS: Able to get around but still shaky/Ready for some wet food/Some teeth coming in/Litterbox training started.

- 28 - 35 DAYS: Sense of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch are fully developed/Eyes still cloudy but true color developing/Teeth in/Weaned from formula.

- 35 -48 DAYS: Crunching on dry food.

- 48 - 64 DAYS: Kitten is fully developed/Probably ready for spay/neuter between 8 to 9 weeks/ Should weigh 2 lb. before scheduling spay/neuter. Usual weight for an 8 week old is 2 lb. Ready for a permanent home.



FINDING A GOOD HOME & SAYING GOOD-BYE

By now, if you have successfully raised an orphan kitten, you are extremely attached to him or her. One of the hardest things is letting "your" kitten go to a new home. You are so used to caring and worrying about it, that you worry where the poor little one will end up.

We suggest:

1. Take pictures of them and show them to all the good people you know who would be responsible owners. Return them to the shelter when they are ready, and if you have time, stay with them on a busy day at the shelter to "sell" them to the right home. You'll be surprised how many great people come through a shelter on a weekend.
2. **DO NOT** ever give the kitten to anyone without having returned it to the shelter first and having the final papers and cash receipt completed at the shelter.
3. Above all, reconcile yourself to the fact that the kitten would not have survived without your help. Give yourself a pat on the back and rest up for the next batch of orphan kittens!

You are life's true angels.

FOSTERING PREGNANT CATS & MOM CAT WITH KITTENS

Thank you for helping give a Mother Cat a happy home in which to raise her kittens. It is extremely difficult to raise healthy, happy kittens in a Shelter situation.

Your mission is to provide a safe, quiet, warm environment for Mom to do the dirty work for you. Because of her, you should have it easy. This guideline will give you a general idea what to expect. Here we will discuss the differences in your care from care without Mom Cat.

CARE BEFORE BIRTH:

First, you will need a private place for her. She should not be exposed to any other animals, and may even attempt to attack other pets if able to get to them. This is normal, protective behavior, and not a problem if she is always completely separate. She knows dogs and cats at times may try to kill newborn kittens. Sometimes near birth, her hormones may make her into a real nasty cat. This is also sometimes normal, and will usually resolve soon after birth.



If you have a bedroom open, she will usually be satisfied to stay in it. If you only have a bathroom or laundry room, this will also be ok. Provide her with several choices of beds and let her choose. She will probably try to hide just before giving birth. I have found an upside down box with a flap open to her bed is often appreciated.

During her pregnancy and while nursing, feed her all the Science Diet Growth, dry and canned that she wants. A daily dose of Nutrical is good if she is underweight, especially while nursing. Stop if it causes diarrhea.



QUEENING:

The labor is usually fast for the first kitten. Mom will clean the kitten vigorously to stimulate breathing and movement. She will bite the cord to sever it. She will consume the placenta and clean the vulva area afterwards. The first kitten may be nursed before the next is born. Usually, this will happen within an hour. Do not disturb her: it may stop the labor. Just be sure she is ok.

If she is disturbed and scared, she may even eat the kittens! Not likely, but don't take a chance. Keep other people out of her area during birth. If you want your children to observe, make sure she already knows them and accepts them, and do not let them touch or be too near her, or make noise.

If she has long contractions for over 2 hours between kittens, take her to the shelter Veterinarian immediately. This is rare. Watch to be sure all is well. If she becomes too tired to clean the kittens, clean out the kitten's mouth and airway.

Stillborn kittens and placentas are usually eaten by Mom. If you can get them away, do so. It may save her some diarrhea later.

The next day after birth, call the shelter for the name of the Vet on call that week. Call and arrange for a checkup for Mom and the kittens as soon as possible (hopefully the same day). This will help determine if there were any problems, and we will also be able to vaccinate Mom after birth.

She will have some bleeding afterwards, sometimes for a week after birth. Watch for too much, and be aware that a brown or odorous vaginal discharge could indicate a retained fetus or placenta or infection. See the Vet.

Mom will normally remain continuously with her kittens for the first 24 to 48 hours. In the second week, she will begin to take a break for several hours at a time. The kittens will normally sleep quietly during this time.

Call the shelter after the birth(s) and report the number and sexes if you can tell, and we will log them into the system. If you name them, report this too. Ready to sex the kittens? The males will look like : , the females like !.

After feedings, Mom will wash each kitten, especially around the head and anal area. She will consume the urine and feces as she grooms.

Handle the kittens several times a day to be sure they know people. If you have small children, be sure they are only allowed to be with the kittens under supervision. Remember, these are very delicate creatures.

By three weeks of age, they will be exploring and playing. See the developmental stages in the kitten guide. This is a more fun time to observe and gently play with the kittens. Mom will then teach them to use the litter box, so supply the cardboard trays with a little litter for them at this time. It is much easier if they can see Mom use her box. I found a covered box a Mom was using slowed box-training till I smarted up and took the top off!!

Use the kitten guidelines to begin weaning from Mom the same as if you were bottle feeding.

Watch for signs of extreme restlessness, refusal to eat or to allow kittens to nurse, or any signs of illness, and take Mom & kittens to Vet for diagnosis.

When the kittens are fully weaned (usually around 6 weeks), you can bring Mom back to the shelter. Then we can dry up the last of her milk and get her spayed and adopted to a happy home. Don't worry about Mom being sad; she will be delighted to get away from the kids by this time! Don't forget to tell people about Mom. She will be the hardest to adopt out during the kitten season, when everyone wants a kitten.

If possible, we prefer to keep the kittens in a home together until they are eight to nine weeks old. You will find these last few weeks without Mom will be the most fun with the kittens as they begin to bond more with you. Be sure to teach them to play gently. Never use your fingers as toys. "Hands are for loving; toys are for playing" is the key. If you are lucky enough to have two or more, they will teach each other that biting hurts.

Any questions? Call and talk to us. We are there to help, and we are so VERY GRATEFUL you are there!

