

Care in Place for Underage Kittens

With thanks to the Arizona Humane Society



Caring for Underage Kittens

Caring for newborn kittens is a life-altering experience not to be forgotten. In this brochure, you will learn a few tips that can help you better prepare you to care for these little feline friends. Consider asking your friends, family or even your neighbors to see if they can give additional support with caring for these kittens.

Supplying a Heat Source

Kittens are unable to regulate their own body temperatures until they are around 4 weeks of age. Until then, they will need an appropriate heat source, such as a non-timed heat pad or a heat disc.

A drop in kittens' body temperature could be life-threatening so be sure to keep an eye out for this (symptoms include kittens being listless, or feel cool to the touch). If a kitten is found and no heat source is readily available, use your own body heat to warm the kitten up, and rub gently to aid circulation. Do not feed your kitten until they have completely warmed up.

At home, provide kittens with a soft nest (box or kitty bed) with a heating pad or other warming device. Completely cover the heat source with a blanket or towel, and make sure that kittens can move away from heat if they want.

Nutrients

Never feed cow's milk to a kitten. This causes diarrhea and does not provide proper nutrition for a kitten. Feed only formula specific to kittens, which can be purchased from most pet supply stores. Use kitten bottles to feed, as they are designed specifically with a kitten in mind. Follow the directions of the bottle manufacturer for bottle preparation. Sterilize the bottles before using. Wash your hands before and after each feeding. If you find yourself with a kitten and no store is open, emergency kitten formula can be made at home. It should only be used in emergencies, and should not replace kitten formula.

Emergency Formula:

- Evaporated milk – 240 ml
- 1 beaten egg yolk
- 2 tablespoon Karo syrup

Mix together well and strain. Warm before use (38 °C) and store in refrigerator. Discard after 24 hours. Neonatal care DVD from Loudoun SPCA.

Feeding

Kittens will need to be fed formula until they are 3 weeks of age. When feeding kittens, they should never

be fed on their backs. This can cause formula to enter their lungs causing them to aspirate and could potentially be life-threatening. While kittens are eating, they should always be placed on their stomachs and the bottle should be held at a 45-degree angle (bottom of bottle higher than nipple). Always warm up the formula and test it on the inside of your wrist. If it is too hot for you, it's too hot for the kittens. The formula should be luke-warm (38 °C).

At four weeks, the kittens' incisors will appear, and at that time, they can be transferred onto gruel (two parts high-quality kitten food to one part water). This mixture is also to be kept in the refrigerator and should be discarded after 24 hours, (reheat before feeding, again luke-warm). Kittens will stay on this diet until they are 6 weeks, and at that point, their premolars begin to erupt. At this age, they are ready to begin to eat hard food supplemented with canned. Kittens should be gaining on average 10-15 grams a day (70-100 grams a week).

Feeding Chart

Age	Frequency	CC (mL) per feed
0-2 wks	Every 2 hrs	2-8
2-4 wks	Every 3-4 hrs	8-16
4-6 wks	Every 5-6 hrs	16-20

Feeding Tips

Don't force kittens to take everything you offer. Feed a little less if not hungry and a little more if hungry.

Days – 3 weeks

Gently pull back on the bottle while kittens are feeding, this will encourage them to suckle and latch on. Wrap the kitten's arms and body in a towel (like a burrito) to make them easier to control.

4-6 weeks

Offer gruel by spooning it up to the kittens' mouth. Gently open the kitten's mouth and place a small amount of gruel on the tongue to entice eating. Place a

small amount of chicken or turkey baby food (meat only with no onions or garlic) in middle of gruel.

Stimulation

Kittens under 4 weeks must be stimulated to go to the bathroom after each feeding. Use a warm, moist cloth, or non-scented baby wipe to rub the genital area in one direction to stimulate for urination and defecation. Solid feces will not usually form while a kitten is on formula.

At 4 weeks, kittens will no longer need to be stimulated and can start to be litter box trained.

Health

Underage kittens can often be fragile, delicate beings and can develop health issues. If at any time you are concerned for your kitten's health, contact a veterinarian.

Additional resources:

Kittenlady.org

Alleycats.org

Somanycats.org