



# Are you willing to care for an underage kitten? Here's our "Starter's Guide"

Thanks for your willingness to care for one or more underage kittens. As you likely know, young kittens present a very difficult situation for shelters like PHS/SPCA that are contracted to provide animal control work. Unless we have volunteers willing and ready to take these kittens into their homes for a short fostering period, we are left with just one choice -- euthanizing the kittens. Young kittens have an immature immune system; they are highly susceptible to a variety of illnesses and we are unable to keep kittens for an extended length of time. Additionally, the 'round the clock care kittens require is beyond our resources.

In taking these instructions and our free starter kit (as supplies last), we understand that you will be caring for this kitten. We cannot provide follow-up care. In the event that your kitten needs care beyond your capabilities, please make arrangements to see a private veterinarian on your own. We may be able to place the same kitten up for adoption at a later date and once the kitten is at least 8 weeks of age, but cannot make that guarantee.

Below, and on the reverse, our guidelines for two important aspects of raising kittens: **bottle feeding** and **stimulating elimination**.

## **Bottle feeding**

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**Bottle feeding a kitten requires special nursers designed for hand-feeding kittens.** Gently insert the nipple into the mouth of the kitten - preferably while it is resting on its stomach — then slowly pull up and forward on the bottle so that the kitten will have its head slightly elevated and extended while nursing. Be sure the kitten is actually suckling by checking the level of formula in the nurser bottle.

**How much to actually bottle feed the kittens?** It is better to under-feed than over-feed a kitten in the first few days. A bottle-fed kitten will usually stop nursing when it is full. If, however, you notice milk coming out of its nose, the milk is being delivered too fast, which means that the hole in the nipple is too large. (If the kitten continues to bubble its formula out of its nose each feeding, you will want to have a vet check the kitten carefully to be sure the inside palate area of its mouth has fully developed.) You will want to warm the formula before giving it to the kitten, to 99°-101°F (the body temperature of cats), and it is recommended that you do this by putting the sterilized bottle into a warm bowl of water to warm it rather than using the microwave, which can cause "hot spots" in the formula.

**We have found it easier to start young kittens off using a plastic syringe (without the needle of course!)** From the newborn stage until the kittens are about 1 1/2 weeks old, use a 3 cc. syringe, and feed every 2 hours. At 1 1/2 weeks old, they are ready for the 6 cc. syringe size and feeding every 3 hours, and at about 3 weeks old, move them up to a 12 cc. syringe, feeding them at least every 4 hours. An average meal for a 3 week old kitten can vary from a single syringe full (12

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fluid cc) to three syringes full (36 fluid cc) for a large and hungry kitten!!! We like and use the KMR (Kitten Milk Replacer) formula, available in most large pet and feed supply stores. While the powdered form is more economical, it does not always reconstitute as lump-free as needed to flow through the syringes (best method is to mix a small amount with cold water first, similar to the process of making lump-free gravy, then add the mixture to the rest of the batch), so we usually purchase the liquid form in the cans. If you shop around, you can find the best economical source for purchasing the formula in your area. If you are unable to locate or purchase KMR in your area, we have nutritious “kitten glop” recipes on this website that you can make from ingredients at home.

**How much formula to give?** Normally, it is recommended that you give 2 tablespoons of liquid formula for every 4 ounces of body weight per day. For very young kittens, you will need to divide their total daily amount into six equal sized feedings, and yes, this does mean during the night, also!! As the kittens grow, the number of feedings and their frequency can be decreased. Also as they grow, they can let you know better when they are actually hungry. Kittens that are not getting enough nourishment may cry continuously, suck on each other or on themselves, and they may have prominent hips or backbones.

**Do I need to burp the kitten?** After each feeding, you will need to hold the kitten against your shoulder and gently burp it. Another technique is to hold the kitten so it's back is against your chest and gently cuddle it under your neck while rubbing it's tummy. A steady weight gain of about 10 grams (or 1/3 of an ounce) per day is recommended, but do not be surprised if a kitten may stay at the same weight for a day or two, then suddenly the weight gains are seen. After feeding, burping and weighing the kitten, check to see if the bedding in the nest box needs to be changed, and that the temperature is correct. Then, put the kitten back in the box so that it can sleep. A properly fed kitten will sleep through to the next feeding.

### Stimulating Elimination

**Normally, kittens will have a couple of firm, yellowish stools per day if they are being properly fed.** Also after each feeding, you will need to gently massage and stimulate the anal and genital area with a sterile cotton ball or piece of gauze dipped in warm water. This will cause the kitten to urinate and have bowel movements, and it is very important that you continue to do this for the kitten until it is definitely using the litterbox on its own, even though most kittens can control their own bowel movements at about 10 days old. The skin area is very delicate and may become raw or sore from your efforts. If this happens, apply a tiny dab of Preparation H ointment to the affected area after each stimulation. Keep in mind that your kitten will probably not have a bowel movement every feeding, and sometimes even skip a day. This should be fine as long as the kitten is growing, eating well, not showing any signs of distress, and urinating.

**Young kittens must be protected from disease!!** ALWAYS wash your hands before and after handling the kittens, and ALWAYS clean and sterilize your bottles, nipples, brushes, or tube feeders in boiling water after each use!! If your kittens did not receive their mother's colostrum (the watery milk the queen produces in the first couple of days after giving birth), your kittens are at an even higher risk as they did not receive the antibodies present in the colostrum. In that case, be sure to keep them separated from any other animals, also.