



Paula Bumpers, DVM & Jennifer Heim, DVM  
303-948-5000

### Orphan Kitten Care

Kittens should be kept warm and comfortable. Chilling is the greatest threat to the kittens survival, as is overheating. A simple kitten incubator can be made from a cardboard box, plastic sweater box or any other type of container. The container ideally should be divided into separate compartments for each kitten for the first 2-3 weeks. This is done to prevent the kittens from sucking on one condition of the stool. The stool will be an indicator of whether you are feeding too much or an early warning sign of infection.

The heat source for the incubator can be a heating pad. The temperature setting should be placed on LOW. The pad should be wrapped with a thick towel and pinned, so the kitten cannot crawl between the towel and the pad. Line each compartment with some type of absorbent bedding such as a diaper or paper towels. The heating pad should be arranged so that  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of it rests against the side of the container with the remainder on the floor of the compartments. This is done so the kittens can snuggle on the heat if chilled, and if too warm can move away from the heat source. Hot water bottles can be used, but there are many disadvantages to their use. The temperature should be set as follows: birth to 7 days 88 to 92 degrees F, 8 to 14 days 80-85 F, 15 to 28 days 80 degrees F, 29 to 35 days and after 70 degrees F (room temperature). Attempt to maintain an even temperature. Be sure there are no drafts. Dehydration can occur if the environment is too dry. Fifty percent relative humidity is desirable, a pan of water close to the kitten compartments will aid in keeping the air moist.

A correct formula is necessary to meet the nutritional needs of infant and growing kittens. A formula called KMR is available from most pet stores or your veterinarian. An emergency substitute can be made with:  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup cows milk, 1 hard boiled egg, 1 teaspoon powdered calcium carbonate, liquid vitamins (as directed on the package). Mix in a blender to make a smooth formula. The calcium carbonate is available from a health food store. The vitamins should be available from your veterinarian. This formula should only be used for a short period of time until the milk replacer can be purchased. The formula should be warmed to body temperature (as for a human baby). Ideally the kitten should be fed using a small animal nurser (available from your veterinarian or any pet store). The use of eyedroppers or a teaspoon can be dangerous. Weak or very small kittens should be fed every 6 hours. Large kittens can be fed every 8 hours. If the kitten is hungry it will whine and cry. If the kitten is undernourished it will become thin and listless. Healthy kittens are sleek and have a plump belly. If well nourished the kitten will be generally quiet between feedings. The kitten should be fed enough formula to enlarge the abdomen, but not to over distend or bloat it; if in doubt about how much to feed-under feed.

Kittens Weight	Amount to feed per day
3 ounces	1 ½ tablespoon
4 ounces	2 ½ tablespoon
6 ounces	3 tablespoons
8 ounces	4 tablespoons
10 ounces	6 tablespoons
12 ounces	7 tablespoons
14 ounces	8 tablespoons
16 ounces	9 tablespoons

These amounts can be increased or decreased depending on the individual needs of each kitten. The volume fed should be divided into equal portions for each feeding. For example, a 3-ounce kitten requires 1 ½ tablespoon of formula per day. This amount is divided into 3 feedings, ½ tablespoon each feeding. At one pound of weight supplemental feedings of dry kitten food can be started. The kitten food should be soaked in the formula making a watery gruel. To ensure an adequate intake of formula the kitten should be weighed at least once a week.

To best bottle feed a kitten hold it in your left hand on it's stomach. Place a towel in front of the kitten so it will have something to grab and push. Gently open kittens' mouth and edge the nipple into the mouth. Do not hold the bottle at too great an angle. The milk should flow slowly; you must be patient. The kitten may at first fight the nipple, but its hunger will teach it to suckle on the nipple. To minimize the amount of air kitten swallows keep the bottle angled upwards. Do not allow the kitten to nurse too fast. Do not force it to nurse. If milk gets into the windpipe inhalation pneumonia can occur.

After the feeding, hold the kitten upright against your chest or shoulder and gently pat or massage it's back using a circular movement. This will encourage the release of any air in the stomach.

If the kitten is being adequately fed and gaining weight, it will be happy and quiet. If the kitten whines or cries it may be hungry. If the kitten refuses food, there may be a problem. The condition of the stool may be helpful in advising of a problem. If the bowel movements are loose or watery, you may be overfeeding or the kitten may be ill. The formula should be reduced in strength with boiled water and then cooled to room temperature. Reduce the total amount of formula fed until the condition is checked and the stool is firm again. Gradually restore the formula to full strength. Should loose stools continue beyond 3-4 feedings your veterinarian should check the kitten.

The mother cat cleans the kittens after each feeding by licking the genital area. This licking stimulates urination and defecation. If hand raising kittens, after each feeding the genital and anal area should be swabbed with cotton or a tissue that has been moistened with warm water.

At the age of 4 weeks you can begin to teach the kitten to use a litter box. After each feeding place the kitten in the pan and scratch the litter with its paw. The kitten may object at first and even eat some of the litter. Simply leave it alone a few minutes. Kittens learn quickly the purpose of the litter box.

It is best not to disturb the kitten except when it is being fed, burped or cleaned. The less they are handled the better. Resist the temptation to play with them, wait until they are weaned to engage them in play.

At 4 weeks of age your veterinarian should check the kitten. Kittens that are hand raised often have a lowered immunity to diseases and may need to start a vaccination program at this time. Female cats should be spayed at 6-7 months of age. Male cats can be neutered at 7-9 months of age.

A neutered male cat will sometimes make an ideal substitute mother. If the mother cat is able she should be allowed to stay with the kittens. The mother cat can provide the warmth and take care of the kittens' eliminations.