

## Guide to Bottle Baby Kitten Care

### What to Expect

Orphaned kittens require the same care as kittens with a mother, but the caregiver must take on the mother's role. Kittens under 3-4 weeks need round-the-clock feeding and monitoring. At this age kittens mostly eat, sleep, and grow, gaining up to ½ oz per day.

Unfortunately, mortality rates for orphaned kittens up to 4 weeks old can be high (up to 50%) due to birth defects, infections, trauma, or poor nutrition. While losing a kitten is heartbreaking, it's important to remember that without human intervention, these kittens would not have a chance to survive at all.

### Supplies

- KMR (Kitten Milk Replacement)
- Bottles/Syringes with nipples
- Bedding
- Heat Source (warming disk or heating pad)
- Cotton balls, wash cloths, and/or non-fragrant baby wipes
- Honey or Karo syrup without additives

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### Warmth

Kittens under 3 weeks cannot regulate body temperature and must have a heat source. Set them up in a warm, draft-free space away from pets and children. A carrier with layered towels works well.

**There must be a layer of bedding between the kittens and the heat source. It is also important that the heat source is placed under only half of the kittens' bedding, so that the kittens may move off the heat source. Too much heat can be fatal.**

If you are using an electric heating pad, set it to **low**. Be sure that the heating pad does not operate on a timer, as you do not want the heating pad to shut off. If you are using a warming disk or bottle, reheat it every four hours, following the instructions on the disc or bottle.

## **Formula Feedings**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Weight</b>	<b>Amount per Day</b>	<b>Amount per Feeding</b>	<b>Feeding Frequency</b>
<1week	2-5 oz	13-30 mL	3-5 mL	2-3 hours
1-2 weeks	6-9 oz	40-60 mL	7-9 mL	3-4 hours
2-3 weeks	10-12 oz	65-88 mL	10-14 mL	4-5 hours
3-4 weeks	13 oz-1lb	95-110 mL	Weaning!	Weaning!

**Step 1 :** Prepare formula using the instructions on the package. Cover and refrigerate prepared formula and open KMR, discard any unused formula after 24 hours, and **NEVER feed kittens any other type of milk or formula.**

**Step 2:** Weigh the kittens and make sure they are warm and active. Never feed cold kittens, as they cannot digest food in this state. Ideally, weights should be taken once daily, at the same time every day. Weight gain is the most important health indicator in young kittens.

**Step 3:** Stimulate the kittens to eliminate before and after feeding. See Assistance with Urinating and Defecating section below for full instructions.

**Step 4:** Warm the formula by filling the bottle or syringe and then placing it in a bowl of hot water. Test the temperature of the formula before feeding by squirting some on the back of your hand. It should feel slightly warm, but not hot. If formula is overheated, and it has boiled, it must be discarded.

**Step 5: Kittens must be fed in the belly-down position, never flipped on their backs.** Their necks should also be slightly elevated. Giving them access to something soft, like a blanket, allows them to knead their paws while feeding, as they would do when feeding on mom.

**Step 6:** When ready to feed, gently insert the nipple into the kitten's mouth and allow the kitten to suckle. If needed, you can place one drop of milk on the nipple to get the kitten started, but you should **never squeeze milk into the kitten's mouth.** If a kitten has milk coming out of its nose, it may have aspirated, and you should seek veterinary care immediately. Kittens will stop eating when they are full.

**Step 7:** After feeding, clean any milk from the kittens and stimulate them to use the bathroom again. Wash all feeding equipment well and discard leftover heated formula, as it should not be reheated.

## **Assistance with Urinating and Defecating**

Young kittens cannot pee or poop on their own and need to be stimulated. Use a warm, damp cotton ball or soft cloth and very gently dab the genital area for about 60 seconds, or until the kitten urinates and/or defecates. **Do not rub roughly or use anything abrasive to stimulate the kitten, as this can be painful and cause irritation.** Kittens should urinate at every stimulation and defecate about once per day.

## **Cleaning Kittens**

Keep kittens free of food, urine, and feces. Use a warm, damp cloth to clean dirty areas. If the kitten is very soiled, you may rinse only their lower half in warm water and wash with a small amount of dawn dish soap. Never use cold water to bathe a kitten and, after bathing, dry the kitten thoroughly with a towel or hair dryer set to **low and held far away from the kitten's skin.** After drying, place the kitten back on the heat source so that they can warm up.

## **Potential Problems**

Suckling on Littermates:

Kittens have a strong instinct to suckle and may nurse on each other's genitals. This can be dangerous. If this happens, separate the kittens when unsupervised so they cannot suckle on one another, increase feeding frequency (without changing the amount of food given per day), and provide something soft for kittens to suckle on.

Crashing:

Young, orphaned kittens will sometimes rapidly decline in health, which can sometimes lead to death. This rapid decline is often referred to as "crashing." Symptoms of a crashing kitten may be excessive crying, limpness, lethargy, trouble breathing or gasping for air, and/or blue tinged gums. During a crash, you may rub a small drop of honey or Karo syrup on the kitten's gums and repeat this up to four times every 10-15 minutes. If you think that the kitten is crashing, seek emergency veterinary care.

## **Weaning**

At about 4 weeks old, you can begin weaning kittens off the bottle. Offer formula in a shallow saucer and let them try drinking on their own. Then, offer a bottle to top them off if needed. Once they are comfortable drinking from a bowl, begin mixing small amounts of wet kitten food into the milk. Gradually increase the food and decrease the formula in the mixture over time.

## **Additional Resources**

- <https://www.kittenlady.org/>
- <https://bestfriends.org/pet-care-resources/bottle-feeding-kittens-comprehensive-guide>
- <https://www.aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/aspcapro-kitten-bottlefeeding-guide.pdf>