

Guidebook: Guide to Raising Underage Kittens

Chapter 2: Caring for Kittens from Birth to Eight Weeks

5 Requirements for Kitten Care:

1. Keep kittens warm.
2. Provide kittens with adequate nutrition.
3. Keep kittens clean.
4. Provide socialization with people and with Cage mates.
5. Protect them from infectious disease.

The Kitten Nest

(NOTE: I'm doing good. Organization was good, and the re-done bullet list is much better. Try to replicate that throughout the document.)

Kittens under 4 weeks of age cannot effectively regulate their body temperature. As the owner, we need to help keep them warm. One way to help them is with a heating pad or other heating device. Cover the heating pad with a blanket or towel so the kitten cannot directly touch the pad. The blankets should be warm to touch, but not too hot. The heating pad should be in one part of the kittening nest, that way the kitten can leave the heating pad if it gets too hot. Another thing is to avoid cold air sneaking into the nest. Placing blankets on the floor of the nest prevents the kittens from touching the cold floor. Turning off fans, closing windows, or placing a towel over the enclosure prevents cold winds from bothering the kittens.

In Summary, a good Kitten nest contains:

- Warm temperature
- Closed windows/No fans
- Blankets covering the bottom of the nest
- A heated area
- A cooler area
- An area containing pillows or blankets

Feeding Kittens

Kittens should eat every single day. If they have a mom, they will nurse from her. If they do not, you are responsible for feeding them. Either way, it's important to weigh the kittens. Daily weight gain indicates that the kitten is eating enough. Weigh kittens at the same time

every day, not only to ensure adequate weight gain but also to calculate the amount they should be eating with each feeding. Kittens should gain about ½ ounce (14 grams) per day or 4 ounces (113 grams) per week.

An overview for feeding kittens:

- Mix one-part KMR with two-part water
- Make sure it's warm
- Lie the kitten on its stomach
- Hold bottle at a 45-degree angle
- Feed the kitten about 2 tablespoons per 5 ounces of body weight
- Kittens under 2-weeks are fed every 2 hours
- Kittens between 3-4 weeks are fed every 3-4 hours

The best thing to feed a kitten is Kitten Milk Replacer, or KMR for short. There might be instructions on the container, but generally you mix one part with KMR, and 2 parts water. The milk should be warm before the kitten can eat it. You can warm the milk by mixing it with hot water, heating the mixture in hot water, or heating it up in the microwave. Either way, the water should be warm, around 100°F(38°C). When heating up the milk in either the microwave or hot water, make sure to stir it before testing, that way you can ensure that the heat dispersed evenly.

Never lie a kitten on its back while feeding. This can cause them to inhale the formula instead of swallowing it. Instead position it on its belly or facing forward. The best way to position the kitten is as they would be if nursing from their mom. Place the kitten on its stomach on a towel or cloth so the kitten can cling to the material and knead.

To bottle feed, gently open the kitten's mouth with the tip of your finger and slip in the nipple. Keep air from getting into the stomach by holding the bottle at a 45-degree angle. Once the kitten learns what is coming, it will search for the nipple itself. You will feel a vacuum effect when the kittens start suckling. If there are bubbles in the bottle, it means the kitten has successfully started nursing. Let kittens suck at their own pace. If a kitten refuses to take the nipple or will not suckle, try rubbing it vigorously on the forehead or stroking its back much as its mom would. Using a toothbrush to stroke the kitten can simulate the feeling that it would get from the queen's tongue. If the kitten is acting frantic while nursing, try wrapping the kitten in a towel while feeding it.

If you still cannot get the kitten to nurse from the bottle, syringe feed it. To syringe feed the kitten, mix up the KMR as usual and then draw it up in a syringe. Put a nipple on the end of the syringe. Test if the nipple fits properly by pushing some milk through it. Try to get the kitten nursing by slowly pushing KMR out of the syringe and into its mouth. Make sure it swallows the formula before you feed it again.

If feeding multiple kittens, it will be easier to get them all fed if you feed each one multiple times during the session. To do this, feed the first kitten until it stops nursing, then feed the second, and so on. After each has had one turn at the bottle, go back to the first and repeat the process. Usually after two or three nursing turns, a kitten has had enough for one feeding. When a kitten has had enough formula, it will usually get some bubbles around its mouth and its abdomen will be very rounded, almost pear-shaped.

Feeding kittens can alert you of potential problems, like health issues or developmental issues. Kittens that seem too weak to nurse may be hypothermic or have an underlying medical issue. A kitten refusing to nurse beyond the first few "getting the hang of it" times may indicate illness. Kittens naturally suckle on each other after eating. Kittens suckling on each other excessively may be a sign it's still hungry. If littermate suckling becomes problematic, especially around the genital area, separate the kittens. Check each kitten's genitals to ensure sucking activity is not causing problems (redness, irritation, penis hanging out, etc.). Suckling on genitals can lead to the urethra swelling shut and having to be surgically reopened.

If the kittens are going to a foster home, make sure to tell the foster parents what is going on. If the kitten isn't feeding from a bottle, if it refuses to nurse, and if it has any infections, notify the foster parents and take the kitten to the vet.

[Click here](#) for a video from Maddie's Institute on Orphaned Kitten Care and bottle feeding.

Stimulation for Urination and Defecation

A kitten cannot urinate or defecate by itself. The mother cat grooms their kittens to stimulate urination and defecation. If you are the foster parent, you get this important duty. Before and after each feeding you should get the kitten to eliminate. Get a cotton pad or a small towel and get it wet under warm water. Then start rubbing the lower abdomen and genital area. Rub enough to get the kitten to urinate, overstimulation can cause infection. Keep an eye out for chafing and lingering dirt and do not let the kitten get chilled. Kittens should urinate during each stimulation and should defecate at least once a day.

When kittens get to be 3 – 4 weeks old, they no longer need help eliminating. Put a litter box in the crate or cage and fill with non-toxic litter or shredded newspaper. When you introduce a litterbox, you should start introducing dry kitten food. Kittens usually chew on the litter, so the food should deter them. It's also a good idea to buy litter that is made specifically for kittens, that way they won't get sick or choke on it. One way to teach a kitten to use the litter box, is to place its feces in the box. That way they smell it there and understand that that's where they should defecate. You can also watch the kitten, and if it ever uses the litter box, stimulate burying the waste by rubbing the kitten's paw through the litter.

[In summary, after each feeding](#)

- The kitten has to pee after each feeding
- And poop once a day
- Get a cotton pad wet with warm water
- Rub the kitten's stomach and genitals to cause it to pee or poop
- After 3-4 weeks they can start using a litter box

[Click here](#) for a video from Maddie's Institute on how to stimulate a kitten to urinate and defecate.

Socialization and Bathing

Socialization

Around 3 weeks of age, kittens need exercise to promote muscular and circulatory development and to learn social skills. They will start playing with their littermates and learn from their mom. Play is the best method to help them physically and socially develop. Make sure they have toys and stimulation in their cage. Pipe cleaners, cardboard rolls from toilet paper and paper towels are great play items in addition to traditional kitten toys.

In a foster home, the foster parent should spend some time each day sitting in the foster room with the kittens and having play time. In a kitten nursery, make sure the kittens get some hands on in-cage socialization time with nursery caregivers. This will help them get used to people and make great pets. Kittens are frightened easily, so approach them carefully, and don't introduce them to any children.

It is not a good idea to introduce foster kittens to any other pets during the first two weeks. Let the kittens get used to their surroundings first. When you do introduce them to the other pets, make sure they are under supervision.

Bathing

If kittens are orphaned and do not have a mom to regularly groom then, it is important to teach them to groom and keep them clean. After each feeding session, give kittens a full-body once over with a barely damp washcloth. Kittens usually get dirty between cleanings, and it's okay to wash a kitten with warm water under a sink faucet. However, you should focus only on the areas that need to be cleaned—usually their butt. After bathing, wrap the kitten in towels/blankets and a heating pad set on low. Make sure you do not leave a kitten until it is completely dry, as a wet kitten can get hypothermia.

To bathe a kitten, fill a small sink or a basin with warm water. If the kitten is dirty, a small amount of Dawn dish soap or baby shampoo can be used. Make the water a nice warm temperature like you were taking a bath. Make sure the bath is quick and thorough. Like adult cats, kittens don't like the water very much and will scratch and try to climb out. It's

recommended that you wear long sleeves to protect yourself. Once you're done washing the kitten, rinse with warm water and quickly dry. The kitten should be completely dry and warmed on a heating pad.

[Click here](#) for a video from Maddie's Institute on bathing orphaned kittens.

Weaning

At about 3-4 weeks of age, a kitten should start weaning. Even though you're weaning the kittens you should keep bottle feeding them. Each kitten learns at their own pace, so you want them to get proper nutrition.

The first step of the weaning process is to get the kitten to lap up formula from your finger and then a spoon. Once it stops relying on the bottle, start putting the formula on a plate. To start weaning it from formula, start putting wet food on the plate with the formula. Place the formula in a shallow dish and mix it with the wet food until it forms a gruel. Gradually reduce the amount of formula in the gruel until it's just wet food.

Some kittens begin lapping right away; others prefer to lick the gruel from your fingers. If this happens, lead your finger to the bowl. Sometimes it takes two or more meals before they catch on. If a kitten does not seem interested in the gruel, try gently opening the kitten's mouth and rubbing a little of the food on its tongue or teeth. Be patient, the weaning process takes time. As the kittens catch on, thicken the gruel. When kittens are eating thicker gruel, they should always have fresh water available in a low spill-resistant bowl.

Kittens often walk through their food. Make sure the kittens are clean and dry before putting them in their cages. Most weaning kittens are messy eaters so you may not be able to leave gruel or water in their cages at first. Wet kittens can rapidly lose body temperature.

[Click here](#) for a video from Maddie's Institute on weaning orphaned kittens onto solid foods.

Kitten Weight Gain and Developmental Milestones

Kittens should gain about ½ ounce (14 grams) every day or 4 ounces (113 grams) per week. Weigh them at the same time every day with a kitchen or small postal scale. Lack of weight gain in a 24-hour period is cause for concern. Begin syringe feeding the kitten if this happens.

0 - 1 Week of Age

Feeding: If the kittens are orphaned, they need to be bottle-fed every 2 hours. If the queen is with the kittens, they should nurse vigorously and compete for nipples. Newborns can nurse up to 45 minutes at a time. Be sure to watch kittens nursing at least once a day if the queen will permit it. Check to make sure that each kitten is settled and nursing. A great deal of activity and crying could indicate a problem with milk flow, quality, or availability. When the queen reenters the box, there should be some fussing for only a few minutes before everyone has settled down to serious nursing.

Environment: The temperature of the nest should be warm: 85-90°F(29 – 32°C). Hypothermia is the number one danger to newborn kittens.

Development: At one week of age, the kittens should weigh around 4 ounces(113 grams) and should be handled minimally. Kittens will sleep 90% of the time and eat the other 10%.

1 - 2 Weeks of Age

Feeding: Continue bottle feeding orphans every 2 - 3 hours until kittens are full.

Environment: Floor temperature of the nest box should be warm: 80-85°F(26 – 29°C).

Development: Kittens at 2 weeks of age will weigh around 8 ounces(227 grams). Ear canals open between 5 and 8 days. Eyes will gradually open between 8 and 14 days. All kittens are born with blue eyes, and pupils cannot be distinguished from the irises - the eyes will appear solid dark blue.

Healthy kittens will be round and warm, with pink skin. If you pinch them gently, their skin should spring back. When you pick a kitten up, it should wiggle energetically and when you put it down near the mom it should crawl back to her. Healthy kittens seldom cry.

To determine the sex of the kittens, hold a kitten on its back in your hand. In females, the vulva is a vertical slit above the anus; they are very close together. In males, the penile opening is above the anus, but they are separated by a raised scrotal sac and thus seem far apart. It is easiest to see the differences between the sexes if you examine all the kittens and compare the differences.

2 - 3 Weeks of Age

Feeding: Continue bottle feeding orphans every 2 - 3 hours until kittens are full but not bloated.

Environment: Floor temperature of the nest box should be warm: 75-80°F(23– 26°C).

Development: If there is a queen, she will start spending more time out of the nest. Kittens will weigh around 10 - 12 ounces(284-340 grams). Kittens begin to crawl around by day 18 and can

stand by day 21. Kittens will begin to play with each other, biting ears, tails, and paws, even before their teeth have come in. Kittens learn to sit and touch objects with their paws.

Kittens begin their socialization phase - they will be influenced by their mother for the next six weeks. Spend more time with the kittens to get them used to people. Do not introduce them to children, or anything else too frightening.

3 - 4 Weeks of Age

Feeding: Continue bottle feeding orphaned kittens every 3 – 4 hours and begin the weaning process. At this stage kittens may start lapping from a bowl.

Environment: Floor temperature of the nest box should be 70 – 75°F(21– 26°C) from this point onward.

Development: Kittens will weigh around 13 to 16 ounces(369 – 454 grams). Kittens eye color starts coming in, and they begin to see as well as an adult cat. Kittens will start cleaning themselves, though their mother will continue to do most of the cleaning.

4 - 5 Weeks of Age

Feeding: They can usually drink and eat gruel by 4 weeks. You should start weaning them, but make sure to bottle feed them every 4 hours until they learn to eat gruel. Introduce dry food and water.

Development: Begin litter training at four weeks old. Use a low box with one inch of litter or shredded newspaper. It is a good idea to confine the kittens to a relatively small space, because the larger the area, the more likely they will forget where the litter box is. Keep the litter box clean and away from their food.

5 - 6 Weeks of Age

Feeding: Feed the kittens gruel 4 times a day and gradually thicken the gruel. You should have dry food and water as well. Some kittens will not like canned food. For reluctant eaters, try mixing any meat-flavored human baby food with a little water. Be sure the brand you get does not contain onion powder as kittens can't eat it!

Development: At about five weeks, kittens can start to roam around the room, under supervision. They will weigh 1 pound(454 grams) and the testicles of male kittens will become visible. The strongest kitten will figure out how to get out of the nest. The others will quickly follow.

Play with your kittens daily! It is a good idea to wear long sleeves and pants, as they can play rough and their claws are sharp. If you sit on the floor they will play "King of the Mountain,"

using your knees and shoulders as vantage points. This game is lots of fun and good exercise for them. Some kittens may be fearful at first; do not force yourself upon them. You can get them used to your presence by sitting in the middle of the room making phone calls; this way they hear your voice but do not feel threatened. Make them an important part of your household activities; accustom them to the sounds of the TV, vacuum cleaner, and other household sounds.

6 - 7 Weeks of Age

Feeding: Kittens should be eating canned and dry food. Feed the kittens at least three meals a day. If one kitten appears food-possessive, use a second dish and leave plenty of food out so that everyone is eating. Bear in mind that a kitten at this age has a stomach roughly the size of an acorn, so, although they may not eat much at a single sitting, they like to eat throughout the day.

Development: By this time, you have "mini-cats." They will wash themselves, use scratching posts, play games with each other, their toys, and you. Many will come when you call them. Be sure to reintroduce them to their litter box after meals, during play sessions, and after naps. These are the usual times that kittens need to use the litter box.

Adoption: It is safe for healthy 6-week-old kittens to be spayed/neutered and made available for adoption. Check your state and local animal ordinances to find out if this is possible for your facility.

7 - 8 Weeks of Age

Feeding: Offer wet food 2-3 times a day (each kitten will be eating a little over one can of food per day). Leave down a bowl of dry kibble and water for them to eat and drink at will. If you have a litter with a mom cat, she should only be allowing brief nursing sessions, if any.

Development: By the end of the 8th week, kittens should weigh 2 pounds(907 grams) each and are now miniature cats.

Adoption: It is time for spay/neuter surgery and adoption!

Kitten Developmental Milestones		
Age	Weight	Milestones
Birth	3–3.7 ounces	Eyes and ears are closed.
	90–100 grams	Sleep 90% of the time.
		Minimal handling.

2 – 3 days		Umbilical cord falls off.
4 days		Begin to purr.
10 – 14 days	8 ounces 227 grams	Eyes and ears should be open. Healthy kittens will be round and warm with pink skin and will rarely cry.
2 – 3 weeks	12 ounces 340 grams	Deciduous incisors erupt, can begin to eliminate without help. Will start crawling, standing, and playing with littermates. Begin regular handling. Ready for deworming.
4 weeks	1 pound 454 grams	Deciduous canines erupt, beginning to walk but do not have great balance, will start to groom themselves, able to thermoregulate. Continue daily handling. Ready for their 1 st vaccine. Ready for gruel and may be ready for introduction of dry kitten food.
6 weeks	1.5 pounds 680 grams	Deciduous premolars erupt. Running, playing, using the litterbox, grooming themselves. Should be eating dry kitten food, supplemented with canned food. Ready for surgery and adoption (if you can place them at this age).
8 weeks	2 pounds 907 grams	Ready for surgery and adoption (if you are unable to place them at 6 to 7 weeks of age).