



Neonatal Kittens

0-4Weeks

Raising an orphaned kitten is a rewarding and challenging experience. Newborn-orphaned kittens are very fragile; raising them requires patience and commitment. But, if you feel you have a heart big enough to give the required time and energy, then you are about to embark on one of the most rewarding experiences life has to offer.

The first several weeks of life kittens are completely helpless and will rely on you for EVERYTHING! The kitten will only do three things: eat, sleep and go potty. Here are some things you should know in caring for your newborn kitten(s).

Feeding

Since mommy isn't around to provide breast milk, you will need to purchase commercial milk replacer. Directions for mixing are on the can. Guidelines for Kittens are a little different than puppies:
1st and 2nd wk of age 6 calories per 1 ounce of body weight daily
3rd and 4th wk of age 8 calories per 1 ounce of body weight daily

Example: You plan to feed a 1-week old, 2-ounce kitten 6-12 times daily. The kitten requires 6 calories per 1 ounce of body weight x 2-ounce kitten=12 total calories needed for 1 day. You plan to feed 6 times daily. Therefore, $12/6=2$ calories are required each feeding. Your milk substitute contains about 1 cal/ml. Therefore, you should feed 2 ml or 2cc each feeding.

This is a guideline only and it is better to feed lesser amounts more often than large amounts at one time. If the kittens are not gaining weight, they need more food. If the kittens develop diarrhea, they may be overfed.

Formula should be slightly warmer than room temperature; you can test it on your wrist just like you would for a human baby. The first couple days you will develop a scheduled feeding time. Expect to feed every 2-4hrs for the first 2wks. Smaller or weaker kittens may require more feedings.

There are several ways to feed newborns. First remember you must care for all feeding utensils just like you would for a human baby. Bacteria can cause gastrointestinal upset and other complications. If you use a bottle make sure the nipple flow is just right by tipping the bottle upside down. Milk should slowly drip out if light pressure is applied. If milk drips out with no pressure added the hole is too big and will cause the kitten to aspirate fluid in his lungs. This can cause pneumonia or even drowning. If you have to apply a fair amount of pressure to get fluid to drip out, then the hole is too small. This can cause the kitten to get discouraged and refuse to nurse. You can enlarge the hole by heating a needle with a match and pushing it thru the nipple several times.

You can also use a dropper or syringe (minus needle) to feed. Remember newborns do not have a well-developed gag reflex, so you must go slowly to prevent fluid from entering the lungs.

Now that you have chosen a method begin by sitting with the tops of your thighs parallel to the floor. This provides a level area for the kitten. It can get messy so cover your lap with a towel. Place the kitten belly down on your lap. NEVER FEED A KITTEN ON ITS BACK. Without raising the kitten's head place the nipple in his mouth if you are using a bottle. He should start nursing right away. However, it might take a couple tries, be patient. If you are using a dropper or syringe start the same way and remember not to tilt the head up.

The kitten will need to be burped during and after each feeding. Hold them upright or over your shoulder and pat their back. Sometimes a kitten may not get the hang of nursing and tube feeding may be required. If this happens please contact a vet immediately. At 3wks some kittens can start lapping out of a bowl, but will still require bottlefeeding. The weaning process will be messy. If you are nursing a large litter you may want to start in the bathtub to make clean up easier. Start by placing formula in a shallow bowl (plastic lids work well too). Be patient, they will walk thru it, snort it up their nose and get it all over them. Once they start to show interest in lapping, you have a couple options:

1. Add just enough canned food to slightly thicken it. Gradually increasing till there is nothing but canned.
2. Add a few dry kibbles and mash them to desired consistency, gradually increasing till nothing but dry food.
3. Place dry kibble in a blender and blend with formula till desired consistency.

This may take a couple days to a week. Some kittens take longer than others. Remember to clean kittens after they eat with a warm damp hand towel. If you have to bathe please use plain Dawn dish soap. Bathing too often can lead to dry, irritated skin and may chill the kitten. Keep them warm and dry!

By 4wks they should have all their baby teeth coming in and be attempting to eat completely on their own.

Urination/Defecation

The first 2wks you must stimulate the kitten to have a bowel movement and urinate. Momma would normally do this by licking the genitals. You can mimic this by gently rubbing the area with a moistened cloth or cotton ball. You should do this before and after every feeding. Take care to dry the area afterwards so a rash does not form. Don't worry if the kitten doesn't defecate right away, it may take a couple feedings.

Some kittens respond better to having their bottoms held under warm, running water while being stimulated. Sometimes in litters a kitten will try to nurse on another kitten's genitals. If this happens you will have to separate them, this can cause bruising, skin infection, or urinary tract infection. Note the color of the urine; it should be pale amber. If it is a dark yellow the kitten is dehydrated. Also, watch the stool; it should be the consistency of toothpaste and dark yellow to brown in color.

Sleeping

If you have a single kitten or a litter, you don't want their sleeping area to be too big. Newborns depend on an outside heat source to maintain their body temp. So, you want them to be nice and cozy. If using a heating pad or other heating device always keep them on low, covered with bedding and enough room to move away from it if kitten gets too warm. You want their bed to be away from drafts and a constant room temperature of 85 to 90 degrees.

Common Problems With Neonates

Chilling

As stated above, kittens depend on outside sources to keep their body temperatures normal. A kitten's rectal temperature is normally 95 to 99 degrees the first week, 97 to 100 degrees the second and third week and 100 to 102 degrees thereafter. If his temperature drops below 94 degrees the situation becomes life threatening. The kitten should never feel cool to the touch. If this happens you must slowly provide him with warmth. Warming a chilled kitten too rapidly may result in death.

Dehydration

If a kitten is not receiving enough fluids, is in a low humidity environment, or has diarrhea he will become dehydrated. You can tell if the kitten is dehydrated by gently pulling the skin on his back. If it doesn't go down to its original state the kitten is dehydrated.

Hypoglycemia

Hypoglycemia is a decrease in the amount of sugar in the blood. Signs included severe depression, muscle twitching and sometimes convulsions. If a kitten is showing these signs rub gums with a couple drops of Karo syrup.