

What to do if you find orphaned kittens

Q. I just found a newborn kitten and the kitten's mother is nowhere to be seen. What should I do?

A. It's always best for kittens to stay with their mom to nurse whenever possible.

Do they need to be bottle fed?

First determine the age of the kitten to see if he or she needs to be bottle-fed or can start immediately on soft food:

- Eyes closed, ears folded over: kitten is 1 – 14 days old.
- Eyes are open; kitten moves around but is wobbly: 2 - 3 weeks old.
- Eyes are open, ears up, can walk around: 3 – 4 weeks old.
- Running around and is difficult or impossible to catch: 4 - 8 weeks old or older.
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If the kittens are under 4 weeks of age they will need to be bottle-fed. 4 weeks and older - can be offered soft food, but may need to be bottle-fed.

Share some warmth

If the kitten is cold, warm her slowly by holding her against your bare skin, which will allow her to absorb your body's heat (if you are outside, your armpit makes a great incubator). Cold is the greatest danger to kittens. DO NOT submerge the kitten in water or use any method that will warm her temperature too quickly. Because she is not able to generate her own heat, wrapping the kitten in a blanket or towel is not sufficient. The kitten must get her heat from you. DO NOT feed a cold kitten. Wait until her body temperature is approximately 90+ degrees Fahrenheit.

Make a kitten box

Put a heating pad in a large cardboard box. It must be large enough to accommodate the heating pad and an area that is not covered by the heating pad. Kittens will crawl toward the heat when they are cold and away from the heat if they are getting too warm. If they do not have an area where they can get away from the heat, they can become dehydrated and die. Turn the heating pad on LOW and cover it with a towel. Never let the kitten lie directly on the pad. Place the box in a warm and draft-free area.

Do not bathe the kitten unless absolutely necessary. If the kitten appears to need a bath, her body temperature must be normal, 90+ degrees Fahrenheit. Flea combing is best if the kitten has fleas. (If the kitten must be bathed, use small amount of Lemon Joy. The citrus kills fleas and is safe for kittens. Flea shampoos are too harsh for kittens.) After towel drying the kitten as much as possible return the kitten to the heating pad. NEVER use a hair dryer.

Feeding the kittens

You can purchase milk for kittens from pet supply stores and from some vet clinics. KMR (Kitten Milk Replacer) or Just Born are the best formulas to feed a neonatal kitten. Do not give a kitten cow's milk, except in an emergency. If you cannot obtain KMR immediately, use the following emergency recipe for up to 24 hours only.

Warm the formula in a nursing bottle or medicine dropper by placing the bottle or dropper into a cup or bowl of hot water. Test the formula on the underside of your wrist to check the temperature. If it feels too warm or too cold on your wrist, it will feel the same for the kitten. If the formula is too hot, wait until the formula cools down. If the formula is too cold, continue soaking the bottle or dropper in hot water. Always be sure to test the formula again before giving it to the kitten.

Place the kitten on her stomach at a 45-degree angle (just as a kitten would nurse from the mother) and let her nurse until she turns her head. Do not hold the kitten's head back, and do not hold her on her

back as you would a human baby, because the kitten could aspirate formula into her lungs. Avoid getting air into the kitten's tummy by holding the bottle at an angle to keep liquid toward the nipple. Pulling back slightly on the bottle will help trigger the kitten's sucking reflex. Never squeeze the bottle to force milk to come out.

Do not panic if the kitten does not eat the first day. She may be more accustomed to her mothers' milk, which is quite rich, and can sustain her for a longer time than replacement formulas. (If she is still not eating after 24 hours, seek veterinary assistance immediately. She may need to be force fed through a tube. Never attempt tube feeding yourself if you are unfamiliar with this procedure.)

Emergency Kitten Milk Replacer Recipe

- 2/3 cup homogenized whole milk
- 3 raw egg yolks
- 1 tablespoon corn oil
- 1 dropper pediatric liquid vitamins



The critical follow up to feeding

After the kitten's stomach is full, it is necessary to stimulate her to help her eliminate. A kitten does not have the ability to do this themselves until they are three weeks old. The mother cat would usually wash the kitten with her tongue to stimulate elimination.

Take a wet lukewarm, but not hot, washcloth or paper towel and gently massaging the anal region in a small circular or back-and-forth motion. You may want to hold kitten over a towel or sink while stimulating her.

Feeding: How much and how often?

This is a general guideline; individual kittens may eat more often or less often.

- 1 and 2 week old kittens = 6 feedings per day
- 3 weeks = 4 feedings
- 4 weeks = 3 feedings

The label on the container of kitten formula you purchased should indicate the recommended amount to feed a kitten according to body weight.

If a kitten cries, she is either cold or hungry. A contented kitten sleeps quietly.

Learning to eat on their own

When the kitten is five weeks old, you can begin weaning the kitten with baby food or canned kitten food mixed with KMR.

Be sure to read the label on the baby food to select a brand that does not have any onion in it, as it is known to cause anemia in kittens.

*For more information on caring for neo-natal kittens you may want to purchase *The Guide to Handraising Kittens* by Susan Easterly, T.F.H. Publications, Inc. It can be purchased from Alley Cat Allies for \$8.00*

