



How to Raise Orphaned Kittens

Kittens are usually orphaned when the mother (queen) is not able to adequately care for her kittens. This may be because she cannot produce milk (a condition called 'agalactia') or because she has behavioral or psychological abnormalities which prevent her from adequately caring for her kittens. In rare instances, the mother may actually not be present due to death, injury, or complications arising from a difficult birthing. Some kittens may be several weeks old before their mother becomes unable to care for them. Successful rearing of motherless kittens requires a regular schedule of appropriate feedings, elimination, playing, and sleeping all in a safe and healthy environment. The principles of raising one orphaned kitten are not significantly different than those of raising an entire orphaned litter. In most cases, an entire litter is orphaned rather than a single kitten. Raising an orphaned litter in the complete absence of a mother is time consuming, but rewarding. It is very possible to hand raise an entire litter from birth with the same success rate as could be accomplished by the natural caring mother. To successfully raise an orphaned litter one must consider:

- Nutrition and weaning
- Sanitation
- Temperature and humidity
- Disease prevention
- Nurture and socialization

Healthy kittens are plump and firm, warm, quiet, and sleep most of the time. Unhealthy kittens have poor muscle tone, initial high activity levels and cry a lot. If not assisted, they become weak, quiet, and comatose.

Nutrition and Weaning

If at all possible, get the kittens to nurse from the mother in the first 12 hours to allow for ingestion of colostrum. Kittens are only able to absorb the antibodies from the colostrum for the first 24 hours of life. If the mother will continue to allow the kittens to nurse while she is made to lay still, that will decrease some of the work load on the breeder. She may decide in a few days that she is willing to care for them and remove the burden from the breeder.

If the queen is not able to nurse and care for the kittens, they will need to be bottle or tube fed or a foster queen may be found. Queens will usually accept and nurse kittens that are similar in size (not necessarily age) to her own. Do not expect her to be able to handle two full litters on her own. Supplementation with a bottle or tube will still be needed.

Bottles for kittens are readily available and are the preferred method of feeding. Tube feeding is best left to trained individuals, as the tube may be inadvertently passed to the lungs and cause choking when the formula is administered. Tube feeding, although risky, is warranted in kittens failing to nurse properly. For most instances, however, bottle feeding is recommended. If the kittens are too weak to nurse from a



bottle, a veterinarian should be consulted to receive information and a demonstration on tube feeding.

Feed a kitten while he is on his belly, not on his back, like human babies are fed.

Commercially prepared kitten milk formulas are readily available and are nutritionally balanced to meet the needs of orphan kittens. Homemade milk formula recipes are also available. These are not perfectly balanced nutritionally, but will suffice for several days until commercial formulas can be obtained. KMR is a well-known kitten milk replacer.

Do not substitute cow's milk or goat's milk for a high quality kitten milk replacer. They are not equivalent. Do not feed raw egg whites, as a biotin deficiency may occur due to an enzyme in the white part of the egg. The enzyme is destroyed with cooking. Honey may contain bacteria, which may be fatal to the kittens.

Whether using a commercial or homemade formula, only make enough formula for one day of feeding and keep it in the refrigerator. Wash and dry the bottles and nipples or feeding tube thoroughly between feedings. Warm the kitten milk replacer in a pan of water until 98-100°F before feeding. Mix well before using to decrease the risk of any hot areas of formula.

The kittens will need to be burped during and after each feeding. Hold them upright or over your shoulder and pat their back. Bottle or tube feeding needs to be done very carefully to prevent aspiration of the supplement with subsequent aspiration pneumonia or drowning. Substitute 2-3 tube feedings a day with bottle feeding to help satisfy the suckling reflex. This should help decrease the kittens' tendency to suck on each other possibly causing sores.

The first 24-48 hours each kitten needs 1 ml of milk per hour. Each day, increase the amount fed per meal by 0.5 ml until a maximum of 10 ml/meal is reached. Kittens will need 9-12 meals per day. During the second week, they should be on 5-7 ml per feeding. By the third week, they should be started on kitten gruel 3 times a day and bottle feeding continued. By the fourth week, they should receive 4-6 bottle feeding a day plus the gruel should be fed 4-5 times a day. The middle of the night feeding can be reduced and then eliminated once they are eating gruel well. They can be completely on solid food by 7 weeks of age. (Caring for Newborn Kittens for the recipe for kitten gruel.) Malnutrition is not uncommon in orphans. Speak with your veterinarian regarding the kittens' diet.

For the first 10 days, weigh the kittens daily at the same time to monitor their weight gain. Then 3-4 times a week for another 10 days. The common first sign of illness is lack of weight gain or weight loss. Each kitten should gain 50-100 grams per week. By 14 days of age, the birth weights should be doubled. In general, if the kittens are not gaining weight, they need more food. If the kittens develop diarrhea, they may be overfed.



Emergency Kitten Milk Replacer > 3 oz condensed milk 3 oz water 4 oz plain yogurt (not low fat) 3 large or 4 small egg yolks - no whites

SOURCE >

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Note: In the Philippines, you can buy Cosj, a lactose free milk from pet supplies stores or veterinary clinics.