

# Raising Orphaned Kittens

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When very young kittens are orphaned, also known as “bottle babies,” foster parents are needed to bottle-feed them and provide them with round-the-clock care. Foster parents must feed, stimulate young kittens to eliminate, take care of their grooming requirements, and closely monitor their progress. The results are rewarding as you watch bottle babies grow into healthy and active kittens. The length of foster care for bottle babies is typically 2-3 months.

## Supplies needed:

- Animal nursing bottle with nipple
- Kitten Milk Replacement (KMR)
- Tissues, toilet paper, or cotton balls (unscented)
- Heating pad
- Small to medium size carrier or nesting box
- Towels or blankets

## Making a Nesting Box

The nesting box does not have to be elaborate; a plastic storage tote (without lid) or a pet carrier will do. It needs to be safe, warm, clean, dry place for kittens to get the tremendous amount of sleep that they need to grow and develop in the critical first few weeks. You will want the nesting box to be in a quiet, private, draft-free location, with the sides of the box high enough to keep the kittens in, and overall box size large enough to allow for some exercise. The area should **NOT** be accessible to other pets. Be sure that the kittens cannot get stuck under bedding or are directly touching the heating pad (if this is a concern, place the heating pad under, rather than in, the nesting box.) When using the heating pad, please keep it on the **LOWEST SETTING**, and wrap it well with a towel, pillowcase or piece of cloth. It is best if you set the heating pad to one corner of the nesting box so that kittens can move to a cooler area if it becomes too warm for them. Be sure to hide the cord to prevent chewing.

## Bottle Feeding (0-4 weeks)

LPCHS will provide you with special bottles designed for hand-feeding kittens. We **ONLY** use Kitten Milk Replacement (KMR) and it will be provided by LPCHS, please **DO NOT** substitute a different brand or use cow’s milk. Prepare formula according to the directions on the canister. **ALWAYS KEEP THE FORMULA MIX REFRIDGERATED AND DO NOT PREMIX MORE THAN ONE DAYS WORTH OF FORMULA.** Always warm the formula before feeding. It should feel warmer than your body temperature on your wrist. The bottle should be warm, but

NOT hot to the touch. Put the bottle into a bowl of warm water or hold the bottle under warm running water rather than using the microwave. The microwave can cause “hot spots” in the formula. Heat only enough formula for each feeding and throw away any uneaten warmed formula after feeding.

**DO NOT PUT MORE THAN THE AMOUNT FOR ONE KITTENS FEEDING IN THE BOTTLE AT ONE TIME. THIS WILL HELP YOU KEEP TRACK OF HOW MUCH EACH KITTEN CONSUMES PER FEEDING AND WILL KEEP THE KITTEN FROM OVER EATING.**

When ready to feed the kitten, wrap their body in a soft towel and gently insert the nipple into their mouth. Hold the bottle so that the kitten is not sucking air bubbles and be sure that the kitten is actually suckling by checking the level of formula in the bottle. Hold the kitten in an upright position. Check the tummy for fullness after feeding 2/3 to 3/4 of the formula to avoid overfeeding. It is recommended that you give 2 tablespoons of liquid formula for every 4 ounces of body weight per day. Overfeeding will cause bloating and distress, and possibly diarrhea or vomiting. Stop feeding when the stomach begins to show fullness. A bottle-fed kitten will usually stop nursing when it is full. Kittens that are not getting enough nourishment may cry continuously, suckle on each other or themselves and they may have prominent hips or backbones. If any of the kittens are not eating well, please call LPCHS immediately.

General Guidelines for Feeding, Based on Age

Age	Time Table	Feedings per day
0-2 Weeks	Every 2-3 hours, 24 hours a day	8-12
2-3 Weeks	Every 4 hours, 24 hours a day	6-8
3-4 Weeks	Every 4-5 hours	5-6
4-5 Weeks	Every 5-6 hours	3-4
5-6 Weeks	Every 6 hours, during the day	3-4
6-8 Weeks	Every 8 hours	2-3

A properly fed kitten will sleep through to the next feeding. A steady weight gain of about .04 ounces per week is recommended. Do not be surprised if a kitten stays at the same weight for a day or two, then suddenly gains weight.

Burping

After each feeding you will need to burp the kitten. To do this, hold the kitten against your shoulder and gently burp them. Another technique is to hold the kitten so their back is against your chest and gently cuddle them while rubbing their tummy. You can also place the kitten on its stomach in the palm of your hand and pat it on the back a few times. This will allow any air ingested to be expelled; however, you will not hear the kitten “burp.”

### Stimulating Elimination

After each feeding you will need to gently massage in a circular motion and stimulate the anal and genital area with a cotton ball, Kleenex or toilet paper. This will cause the kitten to urinate and have bowel movements. The feces should be tan to brown and well formed. It is important that you continue to do this for the kitten until they are definitely using the litter box on their own. The kitten will probably not have a bowel movement every feeding and might even skip a day. This should be fine as long as the kitten is growing, eating well, urinating and not showing signs of distress.

**ALWAYS WASH YOUR HANDS BEFORE AND AFTER HANDLING THE YOUNG KITTENS!**

### Diarrhea and Constipation

If you notice loose, greenish stool or that the kitten is not eliminating, this may mean that you are overfeeding the kitten. Make sure you are mixing the formula according to the directions and that it is not too strong. You might need to cut back slightly on the amount of food per feeding, but do **NOT** decrease the frequency of eating. If the problem persists, the kitten may have an infection or virus, please call LPCHS immediately.

### Aspiration of Fluids

Aspiration or inhalation of fluids into the lungs, of formula can be fairly common. If aspiration occurs, the kitten can be turned upside down and gently shaken once to help the fluid drain out. If this happens with very young kittens, a small bulb syringe or eyedropper can be used to suck the fluids out of the nostrils.

**Do not feed any more to the kitten until it has completely cleared the fluid from its lungs, usually by sneezing.**

**Aspiration can be a dangerous situation and can lead to possible pneumonia and death.**

**If crackling or popping is heard as the kitten breathes, contact LPCHS immediately.**

### Common Signs of Kitten Illness

- Frequent crying
- Restlessness
- Weakness
- Hypothermia (lower body temperature)
- Diarrhea
- Dehydration
- Altered respiration (labored, shallow or “crackling” breathing)
- Sneezing, runny nose and/or goopy eyes

Observe your kittens closely. If you notice they are not thriving, they may have a serious, underlying health problem. Please contact LPCHS immediately if you observe lethargy, persistent diarrhea, refusal to eat or vomiting.

**Call the LPCHS foster coordinator at 970-259-2847 or the after-hours phone number at 970-759-9705 if kittens develop any of the above symptoms.**

### Introducing Solid Foods

Generally, it is best to start weaning kittens from KMR when they are 3-5 weeks of age. Kittens, even from the same litter, can differ widely as to when they start accepting solid foods. At about 4 weeks old most kittens express some interest in solid foods. Make sure that the weaning process is a positive experience, so as not to frighten the kitten. Begin introducing 3-5 week old kittens to semi-solid gruel. Make sure to serve the food at body temperature 3-4 times per day. Remove any uneaten gruel after about 15 minutes and discard. It is important to remember how delicate the kittens digestive system is and how easily it can get upset, take it very slowly.

### Gruel Recipe

2 (large) scoops of KMR

2 (large) scoops of hot water

1 can of wet kitten food

1 handful of dry kitten food

\*You can cut the recipe in half, so as not to waste a lot of gruel.

First combine the dry kitten food and hot water in a blender. Let the dry food soak a little so it blends easier. Then add the KMR and wet kitten food and blend until the gruel is a soupy consistency. You can save unused gruel in the refrigerator for up to 24 hours. You just need to reheat the mixture with warm water.

First, start by offering some gruel on your finger and see if the kitten laps it up. If the kitten does not lick it off, gently smear the formula on or in their mouth, being careful not to get the formula on their nose to restrict breathing. You can also wipe the gruel on their paws so they have no choice but to lick it off. Make sure that once you introduce the gruel, you have a bowl of water and solid kibble available for the kitten at all times. Some kittens will actually prefer the dry food to the wet food and will enjoy teething and crunching on the kibble pieces. Continue working on lapping with the kitten a minimum of 4 times a day and supplement with a bottle to be sure the kitten is getting adequate nutrition and fluids per day. As the kitten learns to eat the gruel keep the gruel moist with water and gradually increase the amount of canned food while decreasing the amount of formula. Ideally, by the time the kitten is 8 weeks old and ready to return to the shelter for adoption, they should be eating almost exclusively dry food, with the canned food only as a supplement. If the kitten is not to this point upon return, be sure to inform the LPCHS foster coordinator for further instructions.

### Litter Training

When a kitten is about four weeks old it will begin to play in, explore and dig in loose, soft materials, such as dirt or litter. Soon, this investigative digging results in the kitten eliminating in these materials.

Kittens do not have to be taught by either their mother or their human guardians to relieve themselves in soft, loose materials or to dig and bury their waste. This behavior is called “innate” or “instinctive” because the kitten is born knowing how to do it.

However, where a kitten eliminates can be affected by its experiences. Litter boxes that do not provide an acceptable place to eliminate, from the kittens point of view, may cause them to

relieve themselves elsewhere. It is important to provide a litter box that meets the kitten's needs so that it will like the box and use it consistently.

Type of Litter: Only use non-clumping litter with kittens younger than 12 weeks. When first exploring the litter box, kittens tend to taste their litter and play in it. This can cause the dust from clumping litter to solidify in their respiratory or digestive tracts.

Depth of litter: It is not true that the more litter put into a litter box, the less often you will have to clean it. Regular cleaning is essential, regardless of the depth of the litter. Kittens and cats will not choose an area for elimination where they "sink into" several inches of litter or dirt. Most cats will not like litter that is more than about 2 inches deep. Some cats prefer even less than that, especially some longhaired breeds.

Cleaning the litter box: Litter boxes **MUST** be kept clean. Feces should be scooped out of the box daily. The number of kittens and the number of litter boxes will determine how often the litter needs to be changed. Twice a week is the general guideline, but it may need changing more or less often, depending on circumstances. If you notice any odor to the box or if much of the litter is wet or clumped, it is time to change all the litter.

**DO NOT use strong smelling chemicals or cleaning products when washing the litter box.**

**If any questions or concerns arise, please contact the LPCHS foster coordinator IMMEDIATELY at 970-259-2847 during business hours or 970-759-9705 after business hours.**

