

## Bottle Feeding Kittens

The following facts and experiences are from 15 years of rescuing cats. I am not a Veterinarian. I have compiled this information over the years from my experience and have documented it because of all of the questions I get about bottle feeding. Please feel free to consult other resources.

### Supplies

Large Crate – I like top loaders

Hot Water Bottle or Heating Pad

Towels

Baby Blanket

Bottles

Kitten Milk Replacement or Goats Milk

Pedialyte

Baby Rice Cereal

Acidophilus Capsules, Kifer, or Yogurt with Active Culture – These are all probiotics

Karo Syrup

Soft Cloth or Baby Wipes

Small Stuffed Animal (if you have only 1 bottle baby)

Food Scale

Bottle feeding kittens should always be a last resort. If the kittens can stay with their mom, it is always best. Mom's milk contains antibodies which is the kitten's immune system.

### Assess the Health of Your Kitten

Never feed a cold kitten. If the pads are cold and the mouth is cold. Slowly warm the kitten up by holding them in your shirt up against your body or putting them in the crate with the heating pad on. Don't warm them up too fast. Just allow the kitten to regulate its body temperature.

It is difficult to see dehydration in small kittens. The "scruff test" is hard to tell. When you stimulate the kitten to urinate, it should be a very light yellow. If it is dark, the kitten should really be given sub-Q fluids at a Vet office.

If the kitten has fleas, you can bathe the kitten in warm water and Dawn dishwashing soap. Just be very careful to keep the kitten warm after the bath. Fleas can cause anemia. If I have to bathe the kittens, I usually heat the bathroom up first by running the shower for a few minutes. Be careful not to get water in the kittens eyes, ears, or nose. Bathe them quickly. Make a soapy ring around the kitten's neck. This will help keep the kittens from getting fleas in their nose and ears. Don't wash the kittens with dish soap more than once or it will dry the skin out.

Kittens can become hypoglycemic. They will be weak, inactive and may have muscle twitching and convulsions. Put Karo syrup on the gums. This will raise the blood sugar. Take the kitten to the Vet immediately.

#### Preparing the Crate

Kittens need to stay warm but you need to take care in not burning them. Put the heat source down and put thick layer of towels over top. I try to use a large crate so that I can put the heat source on one side of the crate. If the kittens get too warm they can move to the other side of the crate. I always use at least 2 folded up towels over the heat source. I like to put a baby blanket or 2 over top of the towels because the kitten nails don't get caught in them like they do a towel. I like using a top loader crate. You can lay a baby blanket over the top but do not cover the side air holes on the crate. I try and keep the crate's air temp at around 85 degrees.

If you have a single bottle feeder, put a small stuffed toy in with her. It really helps the kitten not feel so lonely.

#### Determine Approximate Age of Your Kitten

Kittens are born deaf and blind. They cannot urinate or defecate without stimulation by mom or in this case surrogate mom.

Approximately 3 Days of Age – Kittens lose their umbilical cords

Approximately 10 Days of Age – Kittens open their eyes

Approximately 2 Weeks of Age – Ears open and unfold. The kittens begin to become more active moving around and kneading.

Approximately 3 Weeks of Age – Eyes begin to change from blue to their true color and they start to see better. They begin walking.

3-4 Weeks of Age – The front teeth come in

4 Weeks – Kittens begin urinating and defecating on their own. They begin to play with littermates. They can roll over on their back and get back up.

5-6 Weeks of Age – The back teeth come in.

#### Prepare the Bottle

The nipples do not come pre-cut. Be careful not to cut the hole too large. It is easy to get milk in the kitten's lungs if you get the hole too large. Some people use syringes to feed but again it is easy to get milk in the lungs. Take great care in how fast you push the plunger on the syringe if you do decide to use a syringe.

For the first few feedings, use Pedialyte instead of water and dilute the formula a little more than the instructions recommend. This helps with both diarrhea and constipation. Gradually work up to the instructions on the Kitten Milk Replacement can.

Follow the instructions on the Kitten Milk Replacement to mix. Younger kittens get a higher concentration of the formula. I like to add some probiotic to the mix to help with pooping problems. It

is easier just not to have to deal with diarrhea or constipation if you don't have too. It is not full proof, but it does really seem to help. For kittens over 2 weeks of age, I mix a little baby rice cereal into the formula. It tends to fill them up a little better. This is especially good if you work and have to go longer than recommended between feedings during the day.

Once you have opened the liquid KMR or reconstituted the powdered formula, it must be refrigerated.

Sterilize the nipple with boiling water.

Fill the bottle and make sure it is warm enough. The milk should be about your body temperature (98.6 degrees). Check it on your arm. Be very careful not to overheat the milk. If you do over heat it and have to cool it down. Make sure you check it again before giving it to the kitten. Do not microwave bottles. Heat up water and let the bottle soak in the hot water.

#### Amount of Milk at Each Feeding and Frequency

Refer to the feeding instructions on the Kitten Milk Replacement. Make sure you are monitoring the amount of food the kitten is taking in. It is a hard transition sometimes from the real boob to a rubber nipple. If you have to drip the milk on the kitten's tongue to get them going on feeding, do it. Just don't squirt it down their throat. You can give the kitten pneumonia if you get milk in the lungs.

As a general rule of thumb, newborns need about 1 teaspoon every 2 hours. When they get a little bigger (2 weeks or so), you can go to every 3 hours between feedings. With healthy kittens, I let the kittens tell me when and how much to feed them. They don't typically over eat and they let you know when they are hungry. Occasionally you will get one that won't fuss when she's hungry. Make sure you set your alarm and check the kitten every 3 hours. Most of the time, they are very vocal when it is time to eat. Remember, if a kitten starts squirting milk out of its nose, you need to reduce the time between feedings.

#### Feeding

Some kittens are more difficult than others to get to take a bottle. The best way is to take the kittens head between your index finger and thumb. Cradle the kitten but hold her upright. On the first feeding you often need to force the nipple into the kitten's mouth. I usually put a little drop of milk in the kitten's mouth. Many times that will prompt the kitten to start sucking. Do not squeeze the bottle. You do not want to get milk in the kitten's lungs.

If milk starts coming out the kitten's nose, you have waited too long between feedings. I usually hold the bottle sideways and just drip the milk onto the kitten's tongue. Once the kitten is not so excited, I then try again to allow the kitten to suck. If this happens, make sure you reduce the amount of time in between feedings.

When the kitten appears to be full, burp her and stimulate her so she will urinate and defecate. Remember, if this is your first feeding and you have no idea how long it has been since the kitten had

eaten, don't panic if they don't defecate. Start to worry if you have been feeding the kitten for more than 48 hours and it has not defecated. The kitten may be constipated and it would be a good idea for it to see the vet. Kittens will usually defecate once a day but should urinate almost every time after you feed them.

To stimulate the kitten to go to the bathroom, you are trying to mimic the momma cats tongue licking the genitals. Use something soft like a baby wipe or soft tissue to gently rub in one direction until the kitten stops urinating. If you stop rubbing it will stop urinating, so make sure the kitten stops before you do. Kitten poop will be yellow and firm but soft. White stool can be a sign of malabsorption and green stool can be a sign of infection. If you see either, the kitten should go to the Vet.

Once the kitten has been burped and it has urinated/defecated, see if it wants more to eat.

You can start introducing canned kitten food at 4 weeks. Many will tell you to put the canned food in the bottle. I do not recommend it. I have seen rescuers choke kittens like that. Kittens are the most disgusting little things when you are weaning them. Mix a little formula in the canned kitten food and put it in a heavy, shallow dish. They'll crawl all through it and get it everywhere. This is where the bonding process was important. You won't gag so much when cleaning up the funk!

You will want to supplement feed them on the bottle through the weaning process. They can usually start eating dry food at about 6 weeks. I like Royal Canin Baby Cat. The pieces are very small and easy for them to learn on. You can also soak it in water to make it a little softer as they learn. You should be able to stop the bottle feeding process at the age of 6 weeks. Honestly, the kittens usually just don't want the bottle anymore one day.

### Monitoring Your Kitten

Healthy kittens are vocal when they are hungry. They are active. They eat and sleep a lot and they steadily gain weight. Weigh your kitten every day on the food scale. Keep a log. Weigh the kitten at the same time every day. They should be gaining between .25 and .5 ounces per day.

Sick kittens are inactive, cry a lot, may not eat well, or have runny poop. Kittens go down very quickly. It is important to monitor them closely. If you see signs of illness, take them to a Veterinarian.

If the Vet wants you to leave the kittens, do not hesitate to question what is going to happen. I have had repeated complaints that when left with the Vet they are often not watched or fed all day. I have had too many people complain of this over the years. It is ok to be on top of things. Bottle babies are a lot of work both physically and emotionally. The last thing you want is for all of that hard work go to waste because the kitten sat for 8 hours with no care. I always insist on staying at the Vet clinic if I have a bottle baby there.