

Feeding Your Kitten

What To Feed /Feeding Techniques /Kitten Feeding Schedule

While your kitten is warming up, you can prepare something for him to eat. If this little kitten was hypothermic (abnormally-low body temperature) and in shock when you found him, you should only give him children's Pedialyte (or an equivalent) for the first two hours, until he warms up. Then switch to kitten formula. If you are using children's Pedialyte, dilute it half and half with water that has been boiled and cooled. If you don't have any Pedialyte, you can make a home-made version. This does not need to be diluted.

Keeping Good Records

After every feed, keep a record of how much your kitten has taken. This will help you work out whether he is drinking enough throughout the day. Also, to keep track of his development, if you can, weigh him at the same time every day, using kitchen or small postage scales. A kitten that is doing well will put on between 10-20 grams a day. Keep a record of his weight so that you can identify any weight loss quickly. Your vet will also be glad that you took the time to keep these records, in case something happens down the road.

Kitten Weight

At birth, weight should be approx 3-3.4 ounces.

At age 1 week weight should be approx. 4 ounces.

At age 2 weeks, weight should be approx. 7 ounces.

At age 3 weeks, weight should be approx. 10 ounces.

At age 4 weeks weight should be approx. 13 ounces.

At age 5 weeks, weight should be approximately 1 pound.

By the end of the 8th week, kittens should weigh approximately 2.2 pounds.

Of course, all these weights are approximate. You may have a kitten that is slightly under or over these weights and still be perfectly healthy. If ever you have a concern about your kitten, or he just doesn't seem 'right', consult a vet..

Birth to two weeks

For the first week of life, a kitten's main activities are eating and sleeping. He is deaf and blind but can crawl a little. The remnants of his umbilical cord will fall off at around 3 days of life. After it falls off, watch the area carefully, as it can easily become infected. Use a Q-tip to dab the area with some antiseptic solution.

Between the fifth and tenth day, his eyes will open and he will begin to see his new world. At this stage, his eyes are a deep blue color. Make sure they are clean and show no signs of inflammation or pus and keep him away from bright lights. He will begin to crawl around his box a little more. He may try to walk but will be wobbly. At the end of the first week, his shiver reflex has developed, allowing him to better regulate his body temperature.

Two to three weeks

The ear canals should have completely opened by now and he will be able to hear all the household sounds. If he is a pure white kitten and you notice he does not respond to sounds, he could be deaf. This is not a handicap or a hardship, it just happens. Deaf kitties are a delight, as they are friendly and fearless!

The kitten is more aware of his surroundings and will start to explore his box. He is able to purr and can stand up and walk a short distance. Baby teeth will start to appear. At the end of the third week, the kitten eyes will begin to change to their permanent color. Also, he will begin to eliminate on his own, without having to be stimulated.

The kitten is ready for socialization and can be introduced to other people and animals, as long as they are healthy.

Four to five weeks

At this stage, move the kitten into a larger box so you can introduce a small litter box. Never use clumping litter as many kittens will try to eat the litter as part of the exploration process. Use a plain clay litter or a litter made from paper or wheat products. Use a small-sized litter pan with low edges so the kitten can get in and out easily. One of the best first-time litter pans are the plastic paint roller trays you can buy at any hardware store. With small sides, and sturdy feet, they take up less space and kittens do well with them. The kitten will usually need to use the litter box just after waking up and after meals.

To teach your kitten to use the litter box, put him in, take one of his front paws and make scratching movements with it in the litter. At first, he will probably just play in the litter box and may have some accidents. He will soon catch on, though. The best teacher for litter pan manners is another cat. A kitten learns best by example, because sometimes, in this area, humans can fail at teaching this. Don't become frustrated if he doesn't cover his waste. Some kittens never do, that is why mom-cats are so important - they teach these manners quickly and easily.

Also at this age, he will really enjoy playtime and will begin to play with his toys more. He can walk and run in short bursts. It is now time to begin weaning as he is ready to eat semi-solid food.

Weaning

Weaning is a difficult time for a kitten. He has become used to nursing on his bottle and may be a little reluctant to give it up at first.

The first step is to place a little warmed formula into a small bowl or a saucer, or better yet, a jar lid. For some reason kittens do really well with the jar lid, perhaps it is just easier to manage. Wash the jar lid in hot, soapy water and rinse thoroughly. Dip your finger into the formula and get the kitten to lick it off your finger. Do this a few times, each time lowering your finger until it's at the level of the formula. The idea is to teach him to lap the formula from the bowl. Don't be discouraged if he doesn't catch on the first time. It often takes a few times for the kitten to learn to eat from a bowl.

Once he is lapping formula from the bowl, you can gradually mix in a little wet kitten food. Do this by mashing a little canned food, add formula and mix thoroughly until you have a milkshake-like consistency. Gradually decrease the amount of formula and increase the amount of kitten food over a few days until he is eating just kitten food. You can also continue to give kitten glop in solid form, instead of liquid. Feed him small amounts about 5 times a day.

Continue offering formula in a bottle after he has first learned to lap from the bowl. Once you are confident that he is getting enough food by himself, withdraw the bottle feedings. During the weaning process, he may dip his paws or walk in his food. Although messy, this is a natural part of weaning and his way of exploring this new food. You can lay newspaper under and around his bowl to make cleaning up easier. This is another reason a jar lid comes in handy. He can't really walk in to the whole thing and rarely do the lids tip over.

Don't forget to have fresh water in a bowl alongside the food for him to drink. If he is eating but not drinking water, you can gently give him 5cc of water with a feeding syringe, a few times a day until he begins drinking by himself. Give this water slowly. Do not force it down his throat quickly.

Six to Seven weeks

By the seventh week, your kitten should be completely weaned and eating food from his bowl. Feed him a good quality wet kitten food and introduce him to dry kitten food as well. He will be very playful. Empty toilet rolls, straws, bottle tops and small boxes make great toys. Always supervise his play if you offer him for example, a ribbon, or shoelace. A paper bag makes a great first toy. Toss a tiny bit of catnip inside and watch him pounce!

Always keep plastic bags away from tiny kittens. They can become entangled and choke or try to eat the bag. Part of the processing of plastic includes fish oils or animal renderings, making these bags extremely attractive to a small kitten's developing senses.

Play is very important for proper socialization of your kitten. Just like a human child, the more he plays and explores the more he will grow, mentally and physically. Also, while he eats, sit on the floor near him and gently talk to him, or even read to him. Cats are social animals and the more you interact with this little one the more socially developed he will become.

Keeping Your Kitten Warm

Your first priority is warmth for your kitten. Chilly night air can be deadly, especially to a wet kitten. If your kitten is wet, getting him dry becomes paramount. Gently dry him off with a towel and if it doesn't cause him to be too anxious, blow-dry him with a hairdryer set on low. Avoid the hairdryer blowing in his face. If he becomes restless, then place some dry towels in your dryer and set the heat on low. Let the towels cycle for

about 10 minutes and using a warmed towel, wrap your kitten securely, cuddling him to your chest near your heart. Once the towel cools down, replace it with another one that was kept warm in the dryer. Kittens younger than 10 days old are not yet equipped with a shiver reflex, therefore they cannot maintain their own body heat.

Place some soft bedding (blanket or towels) in the bottom of a clean box and place the box in a warm, draught-free spot. If you have a pet heating pad, place this under the bedding, but give your kitten room to move off the heat if it becomes too warm. Never use a human electric blanket or a human heating pad to keep a kitten warm, as it can cause hot spots on the fragile skin and burn your kitten.

If you don't have a heat pad, you can fill a clean sock with uncooked white rice or white beans until the sock feels firm. Tie a secure knot in the open end and place the sock in the microwave for 60 seconds. Test the temperature before you put the sock heater in with your kitten. Make sure the sock is not too hot. If your kitten is cold, you can curl the sock around him. You can also use a hot water bottle or soda bottle, filled with very hot water and wrapped in a thin towel. Place this in the box next to your kitten. Make sure the soda bottle does not roll on top of your kitten by placing a small object underneath the blanket to stop it rolling.

If you are using these alternative heating methods, you will need to re-warm the sock or refill the bottle with hot water at least every two to three hours. Use another towel or blanket to drape over the top of the box to keep the warmth inside. If you have an air-conditioner in your home, please be sure you do not let your kitten become exposed to the cool air at any time, as a kitten can become chilled quickly and needs to be kept nice and warm. Also, never use a heat lamp on tiny kittens. The light can quickly burn the skin and cause dehydration to set in.

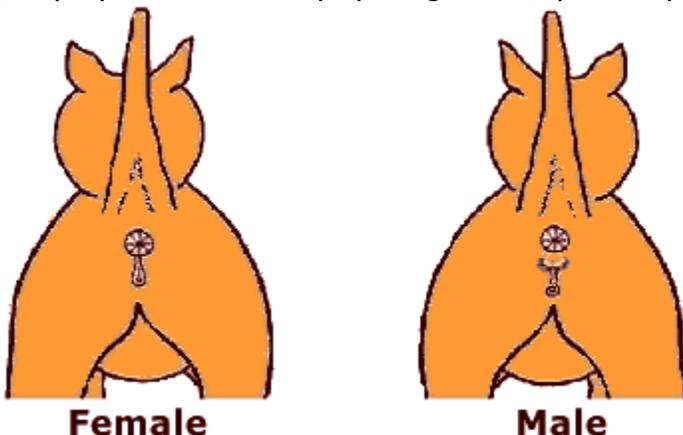
The ideal temperature within the box should be:

- Birth to 3 weeks: 85-88oF (30-31oC)
- Over 3 weeks: approx. 79oF (26oC)

Place a small ticking clock under your kitten's bedding. This mimics his mom's heartbeat and helps him settle in easily. If you have a stuffed toy that you don't mind parting with, put this in the box with him. For an older kitten, be sure the stuffed toy does not have any parts that your kitten can pull off and chew on.

Sexing the Kitten

In kittens younger than about two weeks, it is often difficult to tell their sex. Even competent rescuers and vets can be fooled! A female kitten will have what looks like an upside-down exclamation mark, whereas a male will look more like a colon. Also, the male's urinary opening is lower than the female's and he will also have a little lump between his anus and this opening. This will later become his testicles. Another way to tell is gently squeeze the urinary opening. If the tip of the penis appears, there's your answer!



Stimulating The Kitten

Very young kittens cannot eliminate without help and the mother-cat licks the kitten's abdomen and anal area to stimulate elimination. You need to mimic this action after every feeding. You can even do it a bit before each feeding as well.

Prepare a bowl of warm water and some cotton balls, tissues, gauze or a soft cloth. Dip the cotton ball into the water, squeeze out the excess and, using a gentle circular motion, massage your kitten's abdomen and anal area. His natural response is to eliminate urine and stool. Don't worry if he doesn't pass a stool after every feeding or even every day. Keep stimulating until he stops eliminating, though it's important to know when to stop, because stimulating your kitten for too long can make his delicate skin sore and raw.

Another method is to stimulate the kitten over a sink. Put a bowl in the sink to catch the waste and start a steady trickle of warm water at the faucet, keeping the faucet away from the kitten. Run the water over the cotton ball, squeeze out the excess water and stimulate him as above.

Or, you can simply place the rear end of your kitten into the gentle trickle of warm water (make sure it is not too hot!) and then start stimulating the abdomen and anal area. He should let loose and eliminate quickly. Then wrap him up in a warm towel and keep him close until he is fully dried.

The consistency of the kitten's stools will give you an idea as to whether you are feeding him the right amount and strength of formula. Normal stools have a toothpaste consistency and are a yellow, mustard color. If the kitten develops diarrhea, you may be overfeeding or the formula may be too rich for his digestive system. Try diluting the formula.

Kitten Hygiene

Kittens are fragile and sensitive to disease and infections. This is particularly true for kittens that did not get any milk from their mother. During the first few days after the birth, the mother-cat secretes a special condensed milk called colostrum. The colostrum contains vital antibodies that provide the kitten with passive immunity to many different kinds of disease. Without the colostrum, kittens are more susceptible to disease. In some areas you can obtain colostrum from your vet or the larger pet food chains.

It is important to keep your kitten isolated from other pets and people until he is older. Always wash your hands thoroughly before and after handling your kitten. His bedding material will also become soiled and wet and should be changed frequently. Avoid handling your kitten too roughly and if you have younger children, keep them from handling the newcomer if at all possible.

All items used for feeding your kitten must be washed in hot, soapy water, rinsed well and then sterilized by immersing in boiling water. This does not apply to the feeding syringes; simply rinsing them out with hot water right after feeding, and storing in an airtight container helps keep away the germs. Using dishwashing soap will corrode the rubber inside and make feeding virtually impossible after a few washes. Do not boil these plastic syringes as they will melt quickly. Keep all your supplies together in one place so you can find them easily. (I store mine in a shoebox in the refrigerator). When you wake up at 1:00 a.m. / 4:00 a.m and 7:00 a.m. for a feedings, it is nice to know that your items needed are right on hand. Simply run hot water over the syringes and bottles to warm up the items prior to use.

When a kitten dies

Sometimes, despite your best efforts and care, a kitten will die. Whether it be FKS (Fading Kitten Syndrome) or an unseen problem with the kitten's internal organs or disease, it is always difficult to lose a kitten that you may have bonded closely with. It can be a very distressing time for you but you can take comfort in the knowledge that you did all you could and your kitten's last days or weeks were spent in the care of you, a person who loved and cared for him.

Fading Kitten Syndrome: We compare this to SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome). Suddenly a kitten that appears to be healthy begins to fade. No matter what measures are enacted to save this fragile being, it slips away and you are left with so many questions and an ache in your heart. Did you do the right thing? Could you have prevented this needless death? Chances are you did everything humanely possible to save this kitten. Perhaps the kitten was robbed early on of that first critical period where mom's colostrum could have saved him. You will never know.

Experienced cat rescuers, and even cat breeders have all encountered this devastating occurrence. There is nothing anyone can do to stop it; only love the kitten while he is among the living and mourn him in his passing.