

KITTEN RESCUE

Kitten Care Handbook

Thousands of abandoned kittens are rescued and hand-raised by animal lovers every spring. We've written this guide to help you out! If you find a kitten or litter of newborns and would like to care for them yourself, here are some tips on proper care!



[I'm Scoots
Read My
Story!](#)

We have also included tips for people who have recently adopted a new kitten or cat, and want to make sure everything goes smoothly. Please know that if your new addition comes from a shelter, he or she is particularly at risk for illness. A shelter is a stressful environment for a cat, and their immune systems-- just like ours in times of tension--take a dive, leaving them susceptible to whatever happens to be going around the facility's population. Even when cared for by a responsible rescue group, animals do contract unavoidable illnesses. Please be patient, know you've done a wonderful thing by adopting a rescued animal, and help your pet get a leg up (or all four) on a lifetime of good health.



Our thanks to Carolyn McCray, DVM, for writing part of this handbook.

For extra tips on getting your new cat or kitten accustomed to your home, please read [Welcome Home Kitty](#). If you have any other questions, please phone us at **(818)347-3037**

If this handbook proves to be of use to you, please support Kitten Rescue by taking a moment to look at our [Donate!](#) opportunities.

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Raising Orphan Kittens

If you have found abandoned or feral kittens and wish to rescue and raise them, you probably have more than a few questions about how to do it. Here is a guide that will hopefully give you the answers and information you need. You should also consult our "Basics" section, which expands on the initial guidelines.

Should I Take in an Abandoned Kitten?

Be certain kittens are really abandoned before you disturb a nest. A momcat can be

harder to spot than the stealth bomber, but just because she's not there now doesn't mean she's not around. If the kittens are clean, plump, and sleeping quietly in a heap, odds are that they've got an attentive mom and should be left alone. Abandoned kittens will be dirty and the nest will be soiled, and they will cry continuously because they're hungry. Ideally, kittens should not be taken from the mother until they are 5 to 6 weeks of age. However, kittens born to feral mothers should be taken away, if possible, at about 4 weeks old. At this age, it is easy to tame them and they have gotten 4 weeks' worth of the precious antibodies mother's milk provides. As they get older, it gets increasingly harder to tame them; kittens over the age of 8 weeks who have had no human contact will probably take months to tame...if it can be done at all.

Warmth and First Aid

If a rescued kitten feels cold, warm it immediately, but gently. Place it on a heating pad wrapped in towels and on the lowest setting, or warm a hot water bottle to about 100 degrees (wrapped in a towel) and place it with the kitten. Many veterinarians have incubators to warm a chilled kitten. Do not feed a kitten until it is warm, since it can't properly digest when cold. It is okay, though, to syringe feed a few drops of 5% sugar water or to rub a little bit of Karo syrup on the kittens' lips.



Kittens under 3 weeks can't control their body temperature. Keep them on a heating pad, set on low, wrapped in towels (at least two layers of towels, or one towel folded over) should cover the pad. You'll know if it's too hot if the kittens tend to sleep on the edges. The heating pad should be used until the kittens are about 4-5 weeks old, or until you notice that they're avoiding it. An alternative that many fosters prefer is a heat lamp over the kitten nest.

Kittens should be kept in a box or cat carrier in a warm, draft-free place, completely isolated from other animals. Keep the container covered with a towel or blanket; a small towel or cloth inside the carrier will also keep them cozy. Change the bedding of their "nest" daily, since kittens tend to have accidents! As they get older, they will need more room to exercise, play, and explore. A spare bathroom is ideal for this.

It is a good idea to take them immediately to a veterinarian to be checked for dehydration and general condition. Bring a stool sample if possible to be tested for worms and parasites. Young kittens are always at risk for being dehydrated and it can happen very quickly; a dose of fluids injected under skin (subcutaneously, also known colloquially as "sub-q") is necessary in this case. Ask your vet or vet technician to show you how to do it. This will be convenient if your kitten becomes dehydrated rapidly or in the middle of the night. Even the most squeamish fosters have mastered this and it's not as horrible as it sounds.



Many vets will give you a courtesy (free) office visit if you tell them this is a rescued kitten you are fostering; their staff can give you lots of advice and supplies along the road as well. Don't skip this step! You can also contact your local shelter or rescue group and ask if you can become an official "foster parent" through their organization as you raise your kitten. Many of these organizations help cover the cost of necessary medical care as the kitten grows towards adoptable age.

Feeding

Unfortunately, cow's milk is not nutritious enough for kittens - they will slowly starve to death on it. It also causes diarrhea which is extremely dangerous for young kittens. If you can't get to a pet store right away, consult our recipes for a goat's-milk

based Emergency Kitten Formula. Your first purchase should be a pet nursing kit and kitten formula, available at pet stores. The nursing kit usually includes a bottle, several extra nipples, and a cleaning brush. Cut an "X" in the tip of your first nipple with scissors. Kitten formula (brands include KMR and Just Born) is more economical if purchased in powdered form to be mixed as needed. Pet supply catalogs offer very good values on these products. We recommend www.countrysidepet.com or www.valleyvet.com.

Some fosters prefer the Catac brand kitten feeders, which feature a specially shaped bottle and nipple, but these are harder to find. You know that you have made the nipple opening just big enough if, when the bottle is held upside-down, formula drips slowly from it. Too small an opening will make kittens work too hard to get their formula, tiring them out before they've had enough to eat. Too large an opening will force too much formula into them, too fast.

Before each feeding, sterilize the bottles and nipples by boiling them in water. Formula should be warmed to room temperature. You can do this by microwaving it in the bottle for no longer than 10 seconds (never let it boil), or placing the bottle in a bowl of hot water for a few minutes. Before each feeding, you should also sterilize your hands with antibacterial sanitizer or water with a touch of bleach added. It's a good idea to re-sterilize after you're done with the kittens each time. This way, the kittens and your own pets will be protected against one another's germs. An alternative to this is to purchase a box of latex surgical gloves and use a new pair for each feeding.

Many fosters like to keep a special t-shirt, sweatshirt, or apron in the room where the kittens are kept, and slip it on before feeding and removing it afterwards. Some viruses can live on clothing, and this can help prevent cross-contamination to and from other animals in the house. Kitten positioning for feeding is very important; this is where the crucial surrogate-mom bonding happens. Different people have different "styles" of bottle-feeding. Kittens are most comfortable in a position similar to the position they'd be in if they were nursing from a momcat. One position is simply to place the kitten on its stomach on a towel or cloth on which it can cling; it will "knead" its paws on instinct. You can also sit cross-legged on the floor with the kitten inside your legs, and let the kitten place its paws on your leg as it nurses. Remember to keep a towel on your lap for this-- and use a fresh, clean towel each day.

Open the mouth gently with the tip of your finger and slip the nipple in. Once your kitten gets the hang of it, they will search out the nipple enthusiastically! You will feel a real "vacuum effect" when the kitten gets into suckle mode. To keep air from getting into the kitten's stomach, hold the bottle at a 45-degree angle, keeping a light pull on the bottle. The kitten should be allowed to suck at its own pace. If a kitten refuses to take the nipple or won't suckle, try rubbing it vigorously on its forehead or stroking its back. This replicates the activity of a momcat's cleaning and can effectively stimulate the kitten to nurse. Sometimes you will hear a "clicking" noise which means the kitten's nursing instinct is in gear and should be ready for the nipple. Sometimes a kitten is simply picky; there are two kinds of nipples out there, one shorter and one longer, so you might have to make sure they don't prefer one or the other.

Kittens who seem too weak to nurse can often be stimulated by rubbing some Karo syrup on the lips. If a kitten still refuses to nurse, and this happens beyond the first few "getting the hang of it" times, it indicates illness. The kitten should be put on Amoxicillin; if it does not respond in 10-12 hours then you should take the kitten to the vet.

Kittens have been known to accidentally suck formula into the lungs; if this happens, hold the kitten upside down until it stops choking. A kitten should eat about 8cc of formula per ounce of body weight per day (1 ounce = 30cc so this is just under 1/4 ounce of formula per ounce of body weight). Nursing bottles are marked with

measurements so it's easy to keep track. Weigh the kittens daily to calculate the amount of formula they need; a kitchen or small postal scale should be used. Kittens under one week old should be fed every 2-3 hours; at two weeks old they can be fed every 4-6 hours; after three weeks old, until they are weaned, they should be fed every 6-8 hours. Divide their needed daily intake by the number of required daily feedings, and you'll know how much they should eat each time. Kittens who are extra weak or recovering from a "crash" may need to eat more frequently.

Keep in mind that the younger kittens are, the more accustomed they are to staying "latched onto" a momcat's nipple all the time, nursing small amounts periodically. If you notice that your kittens are not eating enough in one feeding, increase the frequency of feedings.

If you're feeding multiple kittens, you'll have better luck with them eating the required amount if you feed them each several times, taking turns. Feed the first kitten until it stops nursing, feed the second, etc. Then go back to the first and repeat this round-robin. Usually after 2 or 3 nursing turns, a kitten has had enough for one feeding.

When a kitten has had enough formula, it will usually get some bubbles around its mouth and its tummy will be very rounded, almost pear-shaped. After feeding, you should burp the kitten just like you'd burp a human baby; hold it upright against your shoulder and pat it on the back. Do not overfeed kittens, since this can cause diarrhea and a host of other problems. Kittens under four weeks will go happily to sleep after they're fed and full; older kittens will want some serious play and cuddle time.

It's natural for kittens to suckle on each other or on your fingers, even after they're finished eating. This is harmless unless you notice that this kind of activity is causing irritation to other kittens' fur or skin.

Stimulation and Litter Box Training

By nature, momcats lick the "back end" of their babies to stimulate the bowels and bladder on a regular basis. If you are the babies' new momcat, guess who gets this duty! After each feeding, gently rub the kitten on its low abdomen, as well as the genitals and rectum, with a cotton ball, cotton pad, or tissues moistened with warm water. Make sure you rub only enough to get them to eliminate; overstimulation will irritate the area. Keep an eye out for chafing and lingering dirt.

Kittens should (and almost always will) urinate during each stimulation. They should defecate at least once a day. One trick is to slowly count to 60 while you're stimulating a kitten; at that point, you'll know if they're done or if something's on its way out!

When kittens get to be about four weeks old, they are usually ready to experience the wonderful world of litterboxes (and you'll be liberated from stimulation duty!). After each meal, put the kitten in the box and see what transpires. If they don't get it right away, try taking its paw and showing it how to scratch in the litter. They'll catch on before you know it!

Cleaning and Flea Control

After each feeding session, you should also give them a full-body once-over with a barely damp washcloth, using short strokes like a momcat would use. This keeps their fur clean, teaches them how to groom, and gives them the attention and "mothering" they crave. Kittens will often get very dirty and mucked-up in between cleanings; it's okay to wash a kitten with warm water under a sink faucet, but try to focus only on the areas where they need it. A simple "butt-bath" will usually do the trick, but if you must get a kitten wet over more than half of its body, it's safe to dry kittens over one week old with a hair dryer set on low and used carefully, avoiding their faces.

You should also check their ears regularly for dirt and, especially after initial rescue, ear mites. Dirt can be cleaned gently with a cotton ball or swab; consult your vet if you find the telltale ear mite "coffee-ground" type dirt.

If you find fleas or flea dirt on kittens of any age, you must get them flea-free as soon as possible. Young kittens can easily get anemia from flea infestation and really endanger its life. First, use a flea comb to remove as much of the dirt and fleas from the fur as you can. Ask your vet for a flea spray that's okay to use on very young kittens; always read the warnings on any flea product to confirm at which age it is safe. Place the kitten on a towel for about 20 minutes; then discard the towel with the dead and dying fleas that have come from the kitten. After using the spray, give the kitten a bath in gentle or surgical soap.

If you don't have a safe flea spray, you can wash the kitten with a gentle dishwashing soap like Dawn or Palmolive (do not use antibacterial), or a citrus-based shampoo, and comb all of the fleas out afterwards. Make sure water temperature is lukewarm so as not to chill the kitten. Dry the kitten, if old enough, with a blow dryer or you can towel-dry it, then put it in a carrier and aim the blow dryer into it to gently dry the kitten with warm, circulating air.

Other skin irritations to look for are ringworm and mange. If a kitten is scratching excessively and there are bare patches where fur is missing, isolate the kitten from littermates and consult a vet immediately for treatment.



Weight Gain

Kittens should gain about ½ ounce every day or 4 ounces per week. Weigh them at the same time every day with a kitchen or small postal scale. Lack of gain or weight loss beyond 24 hours is cause for alarm and a visit to the vet. Their bellies should always be rotund-- if you squeeze them between two fingers and slowly try to

bring the fingers together, you should NOT be able to do it! You can check to make sure a kitten is properly hydrated by pulling up the skin at the scruff of the neck. If it bounces back nicely, hydration is good. If it doesn't bounce back, or goes back down slowly, they will need at least one dose of sub-q fluids.

Weaning

Weaning occurs at about 4-5 weeks, but keep in mind that some kittens take a bit longer, especially without a momcat to show them the wonders of eating solid food. You will know that a kitten is ready for the weaning process when it is (a) biting its nipple often and forcefully, and (b) able to lick formula from your finger. The next step is to get the kitten to lap up formula from a spoon. Once they've mastered that, try putting it in a flat dish.

At that point, you can mix the kitten formula with baby food into a gruel and try to get the kittens to lap it up from a dish or a spoon. We recommend Beechnut Chicken Baby Food – any meat flavor will do, but be absolutely sure there is no onion in the ingredients. You can also try using Dr. Hill's "a/d" brand which is sold at any vet's. Eventually, you can mix canned kitten food (we recommend Wellness, Avo Derm, Nutro Max Kitten or any other premium brand of kitten food) with formula, gradually reducing the amount of formula until they're eating just the food. It is not uncommon for weight gain to slow and minor, temporary diarrhea to occur during weaning.

Some kittens grasp the concept right away; others take days. Keep bottle feeding while weaning to make sure they get enough to eat. Reduce bottle feeding as their solid-food consumption grows. If you give dry food, moisten it, because kittens can't chew dry food well until about 8 weeks. Royal Canin does sell a young kitten dry food that has extremely small kibbles that young kittens can easily eat.



Remember that changes in diet can quickly cause diarrhea, so keep an eye on your kitten's stools. Consult our guide to stool and urine in the "Basics" section. Diarrhea can be life-threatening to a kitten if left untreated; usually, a dose of one or more types of antibiotics prescribed by your vet will get them back on track.



seem to be pus-filled warm wet cloth and



Development Milestones

Kittens weigh about 2 to 4 ounces at birth; they should double their body weight in the first week. Annie, the kitten you see here, is under 1 week old.

Eyes open at 7-10 days. If eyes or sealed shut, open and clean with a apply Terramycin ointment (sold at pet stores) until the infection clears up; if it doesn't, consult your vet as it may be a more serious eye infection.

Eyes will stay blue until they are about 6-7 weeks old, but true eye color won't settle in until the kitten's about 3 months old.

At about 3 weeks, they will start crawling around. At 3½ weeks, the ears will start to stand up. At 4 weeks, they'll start to play with each other and develop teeth.

A first dose of roundworm medication (Nemex) may be given when they are as young as two weeks old. A second dose should be given two weeks after the first. Tapeworms may be treated at 6 weeks.

The first FVRCP (3-in-1) vaccination should be given at 6 weeks, with a series of two more 21-30 days after the previous vaccination. If you want to vaccinate against FELV (Leukemia), the first vaccination should be given at 8 weeks. Consult your veterinarian for schedule of follow-up vaccinations; these vary with vaccination brands and types. When the kitten weighs two pounds (usually at 8 - 9 weeks old) and is healthy, they are old enough to be spayed or neutered. At this age, they are also old enough to be adopted; if you plan to put your kittens up for adoption, you must not do this before they are 8 weeks old.

Love and Attention

This part's the easy one. Emotional and physical closeness to you is as important to a kitten as food and warmth. Pet the kitten often, letting it snuggle. You'll be surprised how this early cuddle activity will stay a basic instinct as the cat grows into an adult. We've found that hand-raised kittens have a much deeper bond to their owners and are highly loyal, intelligent, and affectionate. Playing with the kitten with a variety of toys is also important; this will help them develop motor skills and also help them bond to you.

Once kittens are about six weeks old and healthy, it's okay to let them interact with other cats and even dogs, though they should have been isolated for at least 21 days before integrating them and have been tested for Feline Leukemia and given their first vaccination.

One Last Thought

All this sounds much harder than it really is. Raising "bottle-babies" is a labor of love for almost everyone who takes it on. Keep in mind, though, that it can be a difficult process and some things are beyond our control. If you "lose" a kitten, you should

never blame yourself.

Taking on an abandoned kitten is a wonderful and educational undertaking. Bravo!



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Recipes for Emergency Kitten Formula

The pet store is closed, and you have hungry kittens that need formula! Never fear!

In a pinch, the Cornell Book of Cats says that human baby formula can be used if made up to double the normal strength (human baby formula is normally not nutritious enough for kittens). As with the below formulas, please remember that any emergency formula should only be used until regular Feline Replacement Formula (such as KMR or Just Born) can be purchased at the pet store. None of these are nutritionally complete for the long term health of a kitten.

Formula #1

- 1 quart whole goat's milk
- 1 teaspoon light Karo syrup
- 1 tablespoon nonfat plain yogurt (goat's milk preferred)
- 1 egg yolk

Knox unflavored gelatin:

- Newborn-1 week 1 pkg
- 2nd week 1 1/2 - 2 pkgs
- 3rd week 2 1/2 - 3 pkgs
- 4th week 4 pkgs

Put goat's milk in saucepan, add gelatin in the amount above depending on the kitten's age. Heat goat's milk/gelatin mixture just until gelatin is dissolved. Remove from heat. Mix in remaining ingredients and refrigerate. It will keep up to one week. Heat to skin test temperature and feed kittens.

Formula #2

- 8 ounces homogenized whole milk
- 2 egg yolks
- 1 teaspoon salad oil
- 1 drop liquid pediatric vitamins (optional)

Mix well and warm before using. Keep refrigerated.

Formula #3

- 1 part boiled water to 5 parts evaporated milk
- 1/2 teaspoon bone meal per 16 oz fluid

Mix well, refrigerate, warm before using .

Formula #4

- 1 can Evaporated Milk
- 1 egg yolk
- 2 tablespoons Karo syrup

All three mixed well and kept in tightly sealed jar in fridge.
At feeding time mix 1/2 of the estimated feeding amount with:
Equal amount of boiling water
(once a day mix 1 drop of human infant liquid vitamins in each kitties formula)

If constipation occurs: add 1 drop of vegetable oil to each kitties formula no more than once daily till problem is eased. Test temperature before feeding (the combination of boiling water and chilled formula should be just about right).

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The Basics

You are going to read quite a bit in this manual about monitoring the kitty's health. Why is monitoring so important for fosters and new owners? It's because domestic cats are fairly unique in nature, in that they are a small, solo predators in a world filled with bigger or pack structured predators. As a survival technique they have the ability to hide any disease until practically the last moment. If they revealed that they were weak or sick out in nature they would be picked off by the first larger predator. This solution works great in nature but hinders us in fostering because cats are sooo good at hiding their disease. That's why you're going to see a ton of directions to seek medical attention. It's always best to be on the safe side and report any deviation from normal. Most of the time it will be nothing, but prevention is always our goal.

If you already own cats, then you've got 9/10ths of this learning curve beat. Even if you've never owned cats before, most of the information in this guideline is pretty straightforward and common sense. The most important thing to remember is, these kids have had a hard life before they reached our doors. Most likely they have had inadequate nutrition, lousy living conditions, and someone just dumped them. Not a great start to a young life. Our goal is to show them that people (especially us) are pretty cool. We need to nurture them and show them the love they haven't received yet. So read on and good cat parenting to you all.

There are some basic principles that can be applied to each and every cat. Listed below are the fundamentals with their definition and explanation following:

- WARM
- CLEAN
- WELL HYDRATED
- NORMAL STOOLS AND URINE

1. WARM

Although not as important in cats over 6 weeks, this is CRUCIAL to babies! We cannot overemphasize the need for warmth in young kittens. If there is nothing else you can do or provide for a munchkin, THIS IS IT! WARMTH. Babies are used to their mom providing a nice 103 degree environment for them, and we must duplicate this the best we can. In the bottle-baby section we will explore this further.

Warm also includes providing a non-drafty environment. For an older animal, all you need do, is make sure it has a nice warm, cozy spot to retreat to. For younger pets (less than 4 months) the entire environment should be draft-free and a refuge (box/crate/closet where there is barricading against drafts and retains heat) for them is mandatory.

If you are having trouble keeping the kids warm and comfy, please contact your vet.

2. CLEAN

This may sound like a big 'DUH' instruction, but it's not. No animal can stay healthy if it isn't clean.

Really though, we should use the word IMMACULATE. Each and every animal should be in pristine, beautiful coated condition, constantly. It's certainly rougher when you have some sick kittens, but still they need to be perfectly clean as soon as you are done with them.

The criteria should be: Can you kiss the kitten/cat over its entire body (including rectum) and not gag? That seems silly (and we're certainly not going to ask you to actually do this!) but it forces you to take a good hard look and find those little 'goobers' stuck in the fur.

Why is this so important? Glad you asked! There are several crucial health concerns that need to be addressed.

1. Cats and kittens both groom themselves and each other. If you have feces, old food or mucous stuck in the hair, the animal could ingest them and make themselves ill.
2. Gunk on the fur can irritate the skin and make it much more susceptible to ringworm infection.
3. Feces, urine, milk and food left on the skin can cause burns or scalds that are difficult to treat and tap the body of vital energy.
4. Kittens, especially, learn to groom themselves from their mom. If they are left dirty as kittens, the kittens accept this and become poor groomers their entire lives. We need to set an example for them so they can carry on the habit the rest of their lives.
5. Although intangible, we all know how we feel if we're dirty and grungy. Certainly cats/kittens seem to feel the same way. Just as we would want any human baby immaculately clean at all times, we want our fosters the same way.
6. And, let's face it. Who wants to cuddle and love up a dirty 'icky' kitty. They've got to be clean so we can snuggle 'em up!!

3. WELL HYDRATED

Okay, this sounds intimidating, but it's not. Hydration is basically how much water we have in our system. Since water drives all of our metabolic functions, you can see why adequate hydration is essential.

Checking hydration is a lot simpler than trying to spell it. If you pull up on your own skin, you will see the skin snaps right back down. This is called skin turgor (how well it snaps back). A well hydrated animal will have quick skin turgor.

are some guidelines.

For healthy kids with no signs of illness, just check skin turgor once daily. It should be quick and immediate, if not, seek medical attention.

4. NORMAL STOOL AND URINE

Let's summarize and say: Poop should be brown and formed. Urine should be yellow.

and Urine Colors (The Scoop on Poop):

Color:

- **Bloody** - Actual red blood seen in stool. Could indicate panleukopenia. **Grossly abnormal, must be seen ASAP.**
- **Mucous** - yellowish/white/clear slimy substance. Indicates severe bowel irritation. **Grossly abnormal and needs immediate care.**
- **Black** - True dark black color to stool. Usually indicates bleeding high in the bowel. **Severe sign, needs immediate attention.**
- **Brown** - Normal color. Be happy!
- **Orange** - Usually indicates way too much bile in stool, can occur with reflux. **Seek medical advice.**
- **Yellow** - Almost always indicates bacterial imbalance in the bowel. If has diarrhea also, usually related to coccidia. **Seek medical advice.**
- **White** - Grossly abnormal color, usually indicates, severe bacterial imbalance and severe infection in the bowel. **Kitten at risk of dying, needs medical attention, ASAP.**

Consistency:

- **Dry/hard** - Abnormal, usually indicates dehydration. Seek care, promptly.
- **Firm** - Normal, be happy.
- **Formed but soft** - Low range of 'normal'. If stools change from firm to soft you should seek medical advice.
- **Toothpaste** - Still has somewhat tubular form but falls apart once touched. Abnormal, needs medication.
- **Cow-patty** - Never formed but thick enough it falls into a 'cow-patty' shape. **Abnormal, animal is at significant risk and needs immediate attention.**
- **Liquidy** - Just fluid that falls out of rectum, thin and may have mucous. **Abnormal, animal is at severe risk and must be seen immediately.**
- **The 'Squirts'** - Animal has no control over bowel and watery fluid squirts out of rectum. **Grossly abnormal, animal in danger of dying, must be seen immediately!**

Water Makes the World Go 'Round: Overview of hydration:

Skin turgor:

- **Immediate snap back** - Excellent hydration. Watch however at this stage for over-hydration.
- **Quick snap but not immediate** - Hydrated. Monitor other signs to be sure the kitten is overall(full body) hydrated.
- **Snap back within one second** - Adequate hydration. However, if ANY other signs, this animal is at risk and needs constant care.
- **Within 1-3 seconds** - Dehydrated. **Needs immediate attention.**
- **Stands up on own** - **SEVERE dehydration. DYING. Must be seen immediately!**

Urine color:

- **Red/Dark Orange** - **Severe sign. Severe at-risk, must be seen immediately.**
- **Dark yellow/almost brown** - Extreme dehydration or bilirubin in urine.

Either way it's BAD! Needs immediate aggressive treatment.

- **Intense yellow** - Concentrated urine. Animal is not getting enough fluid for total body hydration. **Needs immediate care.**
- **Yellow** - Mildly concentrated urine. Monitor closely and if ANY other signs, seek care immediately.
- **Light yellow** - Mildly dilute urine. Overall body hydration should be adequate if no kidney disease. With sick/injured or at-risk animals, this is the color we shoot for.
- **Pale yellow** - Dilute urine. Hydration should be excellent if no kidney disease. With any significantly debilitated or severe risk animal, this is the color we shoot for. Be aware however of possible over-hydration and keep urine this color, only if under medical care.
- **Almost clear** - Severely dilute urine. Risk of over-hydration. Urine should only be this dilute if under constant medical supervision.

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Keeping Healthy Kittens, Healthy - 6 Weeks to 4 Months:

Many of the same principles hold for kittens as well as cats, so we'll only discuss the unique circumstances that apply to younger kids.

INTRODUCTION

The 7-day isolation period is even more important for kittens than it is for cats. Why? Imagine a child starting kindergarten. Everybody usually comes home with a cold of some sort. The same holds for kittens that have been exposed to the pound. Plus they are younger and have weaker immune systems and are more likely to come down with something than an adult is.



Once the kitten is out and about in the household, it is very important to not allow it to harass your resident kitties (at least not too much, after all this is the sworn duty of the kitten). If your resident cat gets too bent out of shape and aggressive towards new kitties, it can make subsequent fostering difficult. Again, make sure your resident kitty is queen bee!

FEEDING

Depending on their age, kittens should be feed between 2-4 times a day. You'll be able to tell how hungry they are and get into a groove.

It is essential that we monitor kittens' eating habits and if ever there is a decrease, you should seek medical advice. Kittens have far less reserve than adult cats and we need to support them even more than an adult.

WATERING

Same as the adult, but usually at this age they haven't quite developed such 'interesting' habits, therefore a typical water dish usually suffices with these guys.

LITTER PAN

For the most part in adults, stool consistency and urine volume can fluctuate without much problem. This is not the case with kittens and any change of stool or urine production needs to be addressed. We really can't take any chances with these kids, given their rough start in life.

WARNING SIGNS

The same as listed for adult cats, we're just even more astute and alert to any change in the kitten's condition.

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Keeping Healthy Cats, Healthy - Over 4 Months



This category includes anybody over 4 months of age. We need to remember that even though they are healthy, they've had a very stressful life lately and most are just out of the pound. Just like us, after extreme stress like finals or a big presentation at work, it's not until we're done and relaxing at home that we come down with a cold or the flu. The same applies to the cats.

INTRODUCTION INTO THE HOUSE

This is why we require a 7 day in-home quarantine, which sounds far more foreboding than it is. Basically keep the new kid in a bathroom or spare room, separate from your other cats. Even if you don't have other cats, if the kitty should break with a cold we don't want the rest of your house contaminated. The bathroom works great because you're in there a lot on, well - your own 'business' which involves significant 'sit-down' time. Plenty of opportunity to socialize with the kitty and love it up.

Why seven days? Because most cold and flu viruses have a 3-6 day incubation period. Therefore if it doesn't show signs of illness with 7 days, it's probably free of anything it picked up at the pound and we can allow it to start mingling with the rest of the household.

Another advantage of isolation of other cats is for socialization purposes. It sounds strange that we should keep cats apart, so they get along better, but it is absolutely true.

When cats first meet, it seems they take an insta-matic picture of the other cats response. If their first meeting includes: arching, hissing, and spitting, it's not going to be a pretty picture. They seem to carry this image of the other cat around with it and hold a grudge, sometimes life long. It's as if each time they come into contact with the newer cat, they pull out the picture (even if the newer cat is being nice and calm at the moment) and say 'see, I don't like ya and I never did!'

If, however, you let them introduce under the door first as they sniff each other, you have a far greater chance of getting them to accept each other. They may hiss and spit at each other, but since they can't see each other, they don't take this 'grudge' picture. Usually within their 7-day isolation period they will stop aggressing towards each other under the door, you can let them see each other, since they have already gotten use to each other's smell. If either cat starts acting cranky, just shut the door and try again later. It's that simple.

This technique is especially helpful if you plan to foster sequential, (different) cats. If each time you bring a new cat into the household and (in your resident cat's opinion) the new cats are always spitty, hissy buttheads, your resident cat is going to resent any visitor and could get stressed out. So we must make sure your resident cat feels:

- a. They are the king/queen of the universe
- b. This new cat is only a minor inconvenience to their lifestyle

c. The new cats really aren't that bad, they just smell a little funny.

If these introductions go well, resident cats usually adopt a non-chalant (read: kitty arrogant) approach to these new invaders and simply ignore the peons. Which is exactly what we want. If they want to make friends and be buds, that's cool, but most older cats will simply be tastefully disdainful and ignore the newcomers.

FEEDING

Feedings should be twice daily with the food left down for about an hour (ex: put it down when you first get up, then pick it up before you go to work and do the same around dinner time). The benefit of twice daily feeding over free-feed systems (leaving the food down all the time) is that you absolutely KNOW the cat's appetite every twelve hours. Most cats will run to the bowl, eager to eat. In this way we can gauge its appetite very carefully.

If we allow free-feeding, it can take sometimes days to figure out if the kitty isn't eating enough. Which, as we discussed earlier, is important since cats hide their illness very well and it is extremely important to catch problems as early as they arise.

WATERING

No, put the sprinkler away. We're talking about putting water out for the kitty. This may seem way basic, but the water bowl should be cleaned out and re-filled with fresh water twice daily.

Some foster cats may be a tad, shall we say, eccentric. Some cats will only drink from glasses (human type glasses and sometimes only if it has ice and dash of lemon!). Another favorite trick is to only drink from running faucets. To these individuals, we usually cater. Just be sure everybody has the fresh water they crave (condiments are optional), at least twice daily.

LITTER PAN DUTY

The litter should be scooped twice daily. This way you can check stool consistency and be sure the kitty is urinating appropriate amounts. Most cats will defecate once to twice daily and urinate 2-3 times daily. Each amount of urine should be about the same size and color. If the kitty is urinating frequently (either large or small amounts), you may want to consult your vet.

If the cat ever cries, strains or spends an inordinate amount of time in the litter box, your vet must be notified IMMEDIATELY. Especially with male cats. We use high quality food and urinary tract problems are rare, but can happen so we must be alert for them.

Anything other than nice normal brown, formed poop and nice yellow urine, should be noted and addressed.

WARNING SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

If the kitty does any of these things, even once, you should be concerned. In most instances, it will be nothing, but again we always want to be on the safe side.

- Sneezing
- Coughing
- Gagging/hairball stuff
- Wheezing
- Tires easily
- Diarrhea
- Straining to urinate or defecate

- Bleeding from any part of the body
- Abnormal twitches
- Loss or decrease of appetite
- Change in attitude or behavior
- Lethargic or depressed
- Breathing heavily
- Or any other problem or concern that you have!

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Food Brand Recommendations

At Kitten Rescue, many people ask us what we consider preferences, usually dictated by the whims of our own cats, but there are some universals we have discovered through experience and consultations with our vets.

What you may hear about "supermarket" cat foods being the equivalent of "junk food" for cats is not just a ploy to get you to buy the more expensive brands. Just like there's a range of how people-food is made, different brands of cat food are made with different standards. While most of the inexpensive foods you buy at the supermarket are nutritionally sound and will certainly not hurt your cat, they are not the best choice. We have found that cats will eat more of supermarket-bought foods, the theory being that their bodies "know" that they need to substitute quality with quantity. These foods are certainly a value, however, and we recommend Whiskas brand, especially their "Mealtime" flavor, as the best of that group.

If you have a few more dollars to spend, any food you buy at a Petco, PetSmart, or similar pet supply chain is probably a superior brand. Foremost, we recommend Innova Evo, Nutro, Artemis, Wellness and Felidae. Other brands high on the list are Chicken Soup for the Cat Lovers Soul, Max Cat Kitten and Royal Canin. Most pet stores will give you samples of foods so you can make sure your cat gives it the "paws up" before investing in a whole case or bag. You will find that not only does your cat eat less of these foods, but they will produce less feces-- always a plus!

Kittens should be fed kitten food until they are at least six months old. Sometimes this is difficult if you also have an adult cat. If it proves impossible to get your kitten to eat kitten food when there's adult food around, eating adult food will not hurt your kitten; she will probably just eat more of it to get the proper nutrition, and if she's active she'll burn it off. Elderly or very sedentary cats should be given "lite" food. Pregnant and nursing momcats should ALWAYS be fed kitten food.

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