

# How to Care for Orphaned Kittens

## Highlights of Kitten Care



### **Warmth-**

Kittens need to be kept warm at all times. Young kittens cannot control the temperature of their little bodies so their bodies take on the temperature of their surroundings - too cold, safely warm or too hot. This is why it is critical to keep kittens safely warm at all times. Ideal body temperatures of cats are between 100° to 102°. Kittens should be kept in a box or carrier on a pet-safe heating pad set on low setting that has been covered with a clean soft fabric until the kitten is at least 3 to 4 weeks of age. A heating pad or heated bed made specifically for pets is much preferred to a human heating pad (which can get too hot even on a low setting) and can be purchased at most pet stores. If a human heating pad is used, adjust it to the lowest setting and cover it with layers of clean soft fabric to prevent the kitten from over-heating. If the kitten is older than 3 to 4 weeks and the room is below 70°, continue to keep the kitten on a heating pad. Always make sure that there is a small area in the animal carrier or box that is heating pad free. If the temperature is too warm for the older kitten, she can go to the cooler area of the carrier or box to escape the heat. A lamp can also be placed over the box and pointed toward the kittens (see picture) to help warm the ambient temperature.



### **Food-**

Kittens should be fed a mixture of 1 part kitten formula (KMR or Just Born are recommended, though there are other formulas available at almost any store that sells pet food) with 2 parts warm water. Another option is to use homemade formula. A recommended recipe includes 3oz goat's milk, 3 oz water, 4 oz plain full-fat yogurt, and 3 egg yolks (no whites). This formula is good for about 48 hours if refrigerated. If the formula has been left out of the refrigerator for 2 hours or more, it must be discarded. Puncture a hole in the top of a pet nursing bottle with a sharp instrument. Be sure to not make the hole too big or too small; be sure to follow the directions that come with the bottles. Test the temperature of the mixture on your wrist. Kittens prefer very warm, not hot milk. A good temperature range is 98-102 degrees. Mom cat's body temperature would normally be 102 degrees. Hold the kitten upright swaddled with a warm towel, never on their backs like you would a human baby. You can also have the kitten standing on a warm towel with its head extended. Kittens need to be fed about every 1 hour per how many weeks old they are. So 1 week old and younger kittens need to feed about every 1 hour, 2 week old every 2 hours, 3 week old every three hours, etc. At 3-4 weeks old you can begin to mix a small amount of crushed up kitten food into the milk 2-3 times a day. By 5 weeks the kittens should be able to eat softened food almost exclusively.

Kalamazoo Animal Rescue  
P.O. Box 3295  
Kalamazoo, MI 49003  
Phone (269) 226-8570  
[www.kalamazooanimalrescue.org](http://www.kalamazooanimalrescue.org)

**Elimination-** Kittens under 2 weeks cannot urinate nor have a bowel movement without stimulation. Use a slightly moistened cotton ball or soft cloth to stimulate the genital and anus area of the kitten. Gently rub or tickle the area with this until the kitten urinates or has a bowel movement. This should be done each time before and after the kitten nurses. The kitten should urinate at each feeding following stimulation, and have bowel movements every day to every 2-3 days.



**Litter Training-** Kittens are litter trained between 3-4 weeks of age. Place a very small litter box or small cardboard box with a small entry way cut in the box. Fill it with a small amount of non-clumping cat litter and a previously used cotton ball or tissue that the kitten has eliminated on. After the kitten eats, place it in the box. Don't worry if they hop right out, they will get the hang of it. It really is that easy, the kitten will start using the litter in a very short time. Never use clumping litter, the kitten could ingest it and suffer severe health problems or even death. Special Instructions- If the kitten has loose stools (diarrhea), decrease the amount of formula fed to the kitten by 25% and add one-teaspoon "plain" yogurt to the formula. If the kitten has started wet food, decrease the amount given until the kitten's system can tolerate the rich food. If the rectum area appears red and irritated, you may apply a small amount of Vaseline to the area. If the diarrhea is severe or present for longer than 24 hours consult your veterinarian.



**Cleaning-** Kittens should be cleaned gently in stroking motions (like their mom's tongue) daily with a warm, moist towel. Never use soaps, they can irritate the skin. If a kitten's bottom becomes grossly soiled, clean with warm running water and dry the kitten thoroughly. Replace all bedding used in the kitten's box daily with fresh.



**Isolation-** Keep young kittens separate from other household pets at all times until after a veterinarian has checked the kitten.

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**Love-** Orphaned kittens need lots of your love. If a kitten is orphaned at or shortly after birth, they have experienced a tremendous loss. It is your job to help the kitten through this stressful period. A ticking clock can help keep young kittens happier, it reminds them of their mothers heart beat. This is extremely important if you have a single kitten. At 3-4 weeks of age the kitten will start to explore and play. Introduce toys and play with the kitten. Allow plenty of time to play. At 6-7 weeks the kittens may play very rough. If the kitten is playing too rough, hold it on its side with both hands until the kitten realizes that rough play is not acceptable. Always remember that kittens are small and fragile, be very gentle with your touch.

**Safety Tips:**

1. Do not let small children handle kittens; they can easily injure the kitten or themselves. Children need to be instructed on the proper handling procedures for the kitten. A kitten should always be lifted by supporting its entire body, never pull on the legs. Shoulder and hip joints are still forming and a dislocation can happen with little effort.
2. Very young kittens should not be handled by anyone unless they have washed their hands. Kittens are easily susceptible to disease, bacterial & viral infections. Keep them and their surroundings clean.
3. REMEMBER - Isolation is very important for the health of your other household pets!
4. Cold kittens- if a kitten feels cold to the touch this is an emergency situation. Place the kitten on a heating pad and **SLOWLY warm the kitten**, making sure to turn the kitten side to side every 5 minutes. **Never ever try to feed a cold kitten, this can cause damage to its internal organs.** Use your own body heat and massage kitten with hands rubbing over kitten's entire body (natural response from kitten's mom would be licking to stimulate blood flow and organs). After, and only after, the kittens temperature has completely returned to normal, can you feed the kitten.

A good website to consult with more specifics is  
<http://www.peteducation.com/article.cfm?c=1+2137&aid=912>

We encourage you to read up!

Thank you for saving the life of an innocent kitten, your work is appreciated and greatly needed.

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