

# Keeping Kittens

## Caring for Young Unweaned Kittens

Thank you for accepting the responsibility of caring for your litter of kittens until they reach 8 weeks of age. Please use the following information to guide you through the next few weeks. Providing your kittens with proper nutrition and care will help them become healthy and ready to be adopted into new homes!

### ARE YOU READY?

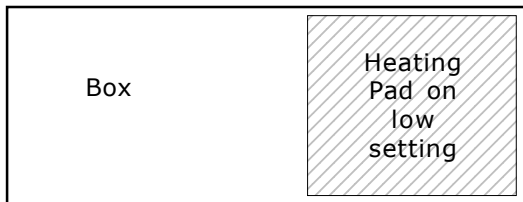
You will need the following supplies:

- large cardboard box or container
- a supply of clean rags or towels for bedding
- infant nipple bottles (Borden makes bottles especially for kittens/puppies - check at the pet store.)
- KMR® kitten formula (this is a milk replacement and can be purchased at our pet store, AlphaPet Supply Store, located in the main lobby of our shelter.)  
**Note:** Do not feed regular milk.
- thermometer
- an accurate scale (postal scale) for weighing the kittens
- lots of **time**, patience, and love!

### KEEPING THE KITTENS SAFE AND WARM

You will need to house the kittens properly:

- Kittens should be kept in a large container away from drafts and cold, preferably indoors.
- A heating pad should be placed inside so that it covers part of one side and only part of the bottom of the box; this way the kittens can crawl onto it when they get cold and off of it when they get too warm. Cover the pad to keep it dry.
- Clean towels or rags should also be put in the box for bedding.



- Keep a thermometer in the box (at the top, away from the kittens!) so that you can check the air temperature in the box. It is very important to keep the kittens warm because when they are under 6 weeks of age they can't make enough body heat to keep themselves warm. Use the chart below to guide you on safe air temperatures. Don't use heat lamps because they can create too much heat! You might want to put a room vaporizer near the kitten box to add humidity which is good for young kittens.

Age	Air Temperature
0-7 days	86-90F
8-28 days	80F
29-35 days	75F
over 35 days	70F

- When the kittens are 5 weeks old you can put a small short sided litter box into their container. Keep it very clean and make sure it is at the opposite end from where you feed the kittens. Young kittens may or may not use it, so be patient!





**HANDLING/SOCIALIZING THE KITTENS**

- Regular gentle handling of kittens is important for helping to develop their personalities and to socialize them.
- Have different people handle the kittens, for several minutes at one time, but at least 4 times a day. Too much handling at one time can be stressful. Repeat this short handling session often to encourage socialization!
- Kittens under 21 days (3 weeks) need to be wiped with a warm, moist cloth around their genital area after feeding to stimulate excretion.
- At 5 weeks the kittens can be introduced to playtoys, paper balls, ping pong balls and cat wands

**TIME TO FEED!**

- Kittens under 4 weeks of age will need a kitten formula; KMR® brand (found at pet stores) is recommended. Do not feed regular milk
- The amount of food to give depends on the age and weight of the kitten:

Age	ml formula/100g of body weight (total amount eaten for the day)
1 week	13
2 weeks	17
3 weeks	20
4 weeks	22
5 weeks	Solid food/gruel

**Note:** 100g = 3.5 oz ml = 1/2 teaspoon  
 If your kitten weighs 200g (7 oz) and is 3 weeks old, then you should provide 40 ml (20 teaspoons).

- Using a sterilized bottle, warm the formula to about 80-90F
- How you hold the kitten during feeding is very important. Hold them horizontally (side ways) with their bellies facing down and their heads tilted slightly up for feeding. Never squirt milk into their mouths or hold them on their backs because this could get milk in their lungs and cause death.
- Kittens under 21 days (3 weeks) need to be wiped with a warm, moist cloth around their genital area after feeding to stimulate excretion.

- Remember to never force the kittens to eat. If they are sleeping, don't wake them up for "their feeding."
- By 4 or 5 weeks of age the kittens should accept kitten food moistened only with water; milk should not be a part of their diet. Milk given after 5 weeks of age tends to cause diarrhea. You can start to offer them this diet as early as 3 weeks of age, depending on the kitten. To make the moistened food mixture or thick gruel use 1 part of dry kitten food with 3 parts of KMR® or water; you can also use 2 parts of canned kitten food with 1 part of KMR® or water. Place the gruel in a shallow bowl and encourage the kittens to eat by smearing some gruel on the kitten's lips.
- Once solid food is given you need not measure nor restrict the amount - kittens seldom overeat! However, make sure that you remove all uneaten food after 1 or 2 hours because the food will spoil and cause food poisoning if the kittens eat it. You should also begin to gradually decrease the amount of KMR® or water in their gruel.
- Kittens eating solid food should have lots of fresh water available in a shallow dish.

**IF THE KITTENS START TO GET SICK**

- Intestinal worms, coccidiosis (an intestinal parasite), upper respiratory viruses and chlamydia (an infection of the eyes and upper respiratory system) are often found in orphaned kittens. All are treatable by your veterinarian.
- Diarrhea may occur with the new diet. Try to increase the water in the gruel and decrease the amount of food. Increase the frequency of feeding to make up for the decrease in food at each feeding.
- However, if your kittens sneeze, have discharge from their eyes, have diarrhea or seem weak, they should be taken to a veterinarian as soon as possible. Do not try to treat with home remedies. Kittens can die fairly quickly if they get sick!
- Kittens can get their first vaccinations at 6-8 weeks of age, preferably before they arrive back at the Humane Society. You can also have them tested for feline leukemia at this time.