



Fostering kittens

When fostering kittens, always quarantine them from other pets for at least 2 weeks as they may be carrying diseases.

Overview

Fostering is a rewarding experience that provides the intensive and specialised care required by orphaned kittens usually less than 8 weeks of age. Fostering requires a commitment of at least 2- 8 weeks. Fostered kittens are often helpless, require bottle-feeding every few hours, assistance with toileting, temperature regulation and most importantly socialisation in preparation for the real world.

If you have existing pets, it is important that you quarantine your foster kitten and ensure there is no interaction with other pets for at least 2 weeks in case they are harbouring any diseases.

Suggested supplies

- Nesting box or crate
- Newspaper or paper towel
- Old towels or blankets
- Heating pad, hot water bottle or infrared lamp (ask your veterinary practice for recommendations)
- Gauze or cotton balls
- Scales
- Syringes (no needles)
- Feeding bottles and nipples
- Feeding bowls and plates
- Kitten formula (ask your veterinary practice for recommendations) - NEVER feed kittens with cow's milk or baby formula
- Canned kitten food
- Thermometer

Key development guidelines:

Age	Development
Birth	Kitten's eyes are closed and ears folded Born blind and deaf Cannot regulate body temperature Cannot excrete on their own
First week	Start to hear
Second week	Eyes open - all kittens are born with blue eyes, however, the colour may change later

	Start to see - sight will not fully develop until 8 weeks of age Start to crawl and stand
Third week	Full sight and hearing Start to walk Sense of smell increases First teeth may appear Will start to excrete on its own
Forth week	Start to run and climb Learns to play Learns to groom itself
Fifth week	Important socialisation skills need to be introduced such as playing with other kittens, interacting with people, being petted for at least 10-15 minutes after feeding Provide a variety of toys particularly to redirect any rough kitten play
Eighth week	Develops full set of teeth Fully weaned Eating canned and dry kitten food

Management

Feeding

It is important that kittens receive the appropriate formula and dosage for good health and growth. Hungry kittens cry very often, suck on themselves or others, and have boney hips or spines. It is common for overfed kittens to experience diarrhoea. Normal kitten stools should be firm and yellow.

Feeding guidelines:

Age (weeks)	Number of feeds per day
0-2	7-8
2-3	6-7
3-4	5-6
4-6	4-5

After each feed, kittens younger than 3 weeks of age should be stimulated to urinate and defaecate every few hours. This is achieved by taking a warm, dampened cotton ball and using it to gently massage the anus and urinary areas. From 3-4 weeks of age, a kitten should be encouraged to use a litter box. Always monitor the kitten to make sure it does not try to eat the litter.

Kittens over 3 weeks of age can be weaned onto solids. This should be a gradual change from formula to canned kitten food. Start off by mixing small amounts of canned food in the formula and serving it in a bowl. Over one week, you can introduce canned and dry kitten food. Having dry food available all the time is fine, as kittens don't tend to overeat. But never have the food sitting out for more than 4 hours.

Additionally, never feed a kitten cow's milk, as it does not provide adequate nutrition. Always use a specified kitten formula.

Weight

Kittens grow rapidly from birth, doubling in weight during the first week of age. On average, a kitten should gain about 10-15 grams a day.

Weight guidelines:

Age (days)	Average weight (grams)
1	70-136
5	85-200
15	128-330
20	565-410
25	225-475

Temperature

Newborn kittens cannot regulate their own body temperature and are dependent on the carer to provide artificial warmth. Kittens can be kept warm a number of ways: using hot water bottles wrapped in towels, veterinary recommended heat pads (on the lowest setting) and/or dressing them in woollen jumpers made from old socks.

Body temperature guidelines:

Age (days)	Average body temperature (Celsius)
Birth	35.5-37.7
1-14	35.5-37.2
14-28	36.6-37.7
28-56	37.7-38.3

Signs of an unwell kitten:

- Diarrhoea lasting more than 24 hours, or with blood in it
- Dehydration - this can be determined by pinching the skin on a kitten's back. If the skin remains as a ridge as opposed to bouncing back into place, the kitten is dehydrated.
- Bloated tummy
- Weakness
- Vomiting
- Not eating for more than 12 hours
- Seizures
- Hair loss
- Presence of worms
- Presence of fleas
- Respiratory problems such as an eye or nose discharge, sneezing or coughing

If your foster kitten experiences any of these signs, seek veterinary attention immediately.

Tips

Tips for caring for a foster kitten:

- Always wash your hands before handling a kitten or preparing its food
- Always change your clothes before handling a new kitten
- Keep the kitten's environment clean at all times

Tips for socialisation:

- Introduce your kitten to other kittens
- Introduce your kitten to a variety of people
- Never encourage rough play with your hands or feet
- Never punish a kitten
- Always spend 10-15 minutes quietly petting your kitten after feeding
- Set up scratching posts and redirect inappropriate scratching by temporarily placing foil or double-sided sticky tape on unwanted areas until the kitten's temptation subsides
- Use a variety of toys such as squeaky toys or mice on a string
- Ensure the kitten is used to its paws being handled, and with eyes and ears being checked