

HAND REARING KITTENS

Young kittens may need to be hand-raised for many reasons including:

- The kittens are orphaned or abandoned
- The mother develops a medical condition (e.g. mastitis, eclampsia (Also known as low calcium levels)) or requires medication which is not safe for kittens
- A large litter
- The mother has inadequate milk supply
- The mother is aggressive towards the kittens or refuses to nurse
- The kitten has a medical condition and cannot feed from the mother

HOW DO YOU FEED A KITTEN?

Bottle

Ideally a bottle and teat designed specifically for kittens is the best form of feeding. Making a note of the amount taken per feed as it is important to establish that the kittens are having the right amount of formula per day.



WHEN AND HOW MUCH DO I FEED?

The longer a kitten is able to feed from their mother, the easier it will be to raise a litter of healthy kittens.

Use an appropriate formula at the correct dilution to ensure kittens do not get diarrhoea or constipation. Animalac, Biolac and Divetelact are the most commonly available formulas and are cost effective. Work out the amount required per day and divide it by the amount of feeds (e.g. 12 -16 feeds per day over the first week) so you know how much is required per feed.



Feeding must be in small, regular amounts. Initially, every 1-2 hours (including overnight) is appropriate but this can be drawn out as the kittens get older and stronger (see table below). Excessive amounts fed infrequently can lead to diarrhoea. Do not force the formula in, rather let the kitten suck it out, in order to help prevent aspiration pneumonia.

FEEDING TIMES

Estimated Age	Feeds in 24hrs	Intervals
0-2 weeks:	10 feeds in 24 hours	2 – 2.5 hour intervals.
2-4 weeks:	7 feeds in 24 hours	2.5 – 3.5 hour intervals
4-5 weeks:	5 feeds in 24 hours	3.5 –5 hour intervals.

Once kittens start on solids, time between feeds will generally lengthen as solid food is more filling and requires a longer time to digest. The milk should be warmed to 35 - 38°C before feeding (~ the same temperature as the skin of the human forearm). Test the milk on the skin before feeding to ensure it is not too hot.

Kittens should be weighed daily when small and 2 x weekly when larger, the kittens should always be gaining weight, never losing weight.

HOW DO I GET MY KITTEN TO URINATE AND DEFAECATE?

Urination and defecation need to be stimulated after feeding (every feed). Use a moistened, warm tissue or cotton wool ball and a patting motion, rather than a wiping motion. This will assist in preventing urine scalding or moist dermatitis.



OTHER IMPORTANT POINTS

HEATING

Heating is very important as kittens will become cold very quickly. Electric pad heaters may not be sufficient if they are the type that produce heat proportional to weight. Hot water bottles require constant refilling and can cause burns to the kittens if not sufficiently insulated. Newspaper makes the best bedding because it retains warmth and can be disposed of easily in the event it gets soiled.

Blankets and towels do not retain heat as easily, require frequent laundering and can be a source of infection if left soiled for a period of time. It is also possible that kittens will become trapped in them.



CLEAN ENVIRONMENT

The environment which the kittens are being kept should be kept as clean as possible. Obviously total sterility is impossible, but bedding should be changed at least daily, or more often if soiled. Use of disinfectants to clean the cage and equipment is important. Isolation from other cats is also important until the kittens have been vaccinated.

HEALTH CARE

Worming

Kittens should be wormed for intestinal worms at 4, 6, 8, 10 and 12 weeks of age (and then monthly until 6 months of age.)

Vaccination

Your kitten will require a course of three vaccinations:

- 6 weeks First Vaccination - Temporary
- 10 Weeks Booster Vaccination
- 14 Weeks Final Vaccination
- One week after the 14 vaccination your kitten can go outside and socialise with other cats

Flees

Kittens can be given a topical flea treatment as early as 6-8 weeks of age, then monthly.

Weaning

For hand-reared kittens, early weaning should be encouraged. This can be started from as early as 14-18 days old with a suitable early weaning formula (such as Royal Canin®). This should initially be done as a supplementation to formula feeding and gradually increased in frequency over the ensuing days to not stress the intestinal system of the kitten. Start with a reasonably thick mixture and place a small amount in the kitten's mouth, allowing it to become familiar with the new taste and texture by gently chewing.

Socialisation

Single kittens are likely to develop some strange behavioural problems if they do not have any contact with othercats within the key developmental period (4-12 weeks) so allowing supervised contact with older, vaccinated cats may be advised. This can also assist them to learn self-grooming behaviours.



If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact the clinic during our opening hours

Mon to Fri: 8.30am to 7.30pm

Sat: 9.00am to 4.00pm

Sun: 10.00am to 11.00am (Emergency only)