

## Quick Guide to Kitten Care

A compilation of the experience and wisdom of several volunteers!

### Question 1: Where is Mom?

Here: Great, she'll do most of the work. Feed Mom high quality kitten food supplemented with Kitten Milk Replacement (KMR), vitamins and anything your vet may recommend. She's feeding an entire family so treat her well! (This diet is too rich for some adult momma cats. If she develops diarrhea try giving her a high quality adult food instead.)

Keep Mom's litter clean and change the towels, box, etc. often to keep this area clean. You may want to have a big box with high sides for Mom, and a small low-sided box for the kittens. Privacy is important too. Keep the little family where they are safe and won't be disturbed by other pets and family activities.

Keep an eye on Momma's health and demeanor. She could develop a uterine infection due to the birth of the kittens. If she becomes lethargic or shows any signs of distress, she should visit the vet to make sure she's OK. Note that she should not be vaccinated for distemper or rabies until the kittens are old enough; please check with your vet.

If Mom appears very thin (perhaps because she was rescued from outside), it is especially important that she have plenty of food and water available. She may need to be dewormed. Even if she is fine, she probably won't recover completely and fill out until after the kittens are weaned and she has been spayed.

Not sure where: You'll have to be the "mom". See Question 2!



Mia and her babies

## Question 2: How young are the kittens?

0-2 weeks – tiny kittens (look like mice!), eyes just open or not open at all, ears may still be flattened against the head, can't walk



Lil' orphan Betsy Ross

Kittens this small are a real challenge! At this age, kittens need to be fed every 2 hours, must be kept warm, and need to be stimulated to urinate and have bowel movements. When Mom isn't around, these tasks fall to you.

Feedings should be done using a small bottle for kittens – clip off the tip of the nipple and make sure the kitten can easily suck milk out. Do not feed cow's milk – you should use Kitten Milk Replacer (KMR) or a similar product for newborns, following the directions on the can (available from pet stores). The KMR should be warm but not hot (try a few drops on your wrist). Be careful not to force the milk into the kitten's mouth; if she inhales the milk it can kill her.

To help kittens with “pottying” use a cotton ball or soft paper towel moistened with warm water and stroke over the urinary and anal parts after each mealtime. If Momma were here, she'd be licking their little bottoms to keep them clean (Ewwww!).

Kittens this small need to be kept on a heating blanket/pad constantly to keep them at the right temperature. Be sure to wrap the heating pad securely with a towel, and keep it set on warm but not hot. The kittens should be confined in a safe place where they can curl up together (this also helps to keep them warm) and away from drafts, fumes, and other animals.

A note of caution: caring for babies this young is challenging, and even the best of us can lose a kitten at this age. Sometimes they have congenital problems that go undetected, and sometimes they get infections that they can't defeat. If a kitten develops a cold or "yucky" eye, you need to get him to the vet right away! Their immune systems are not strong enough to overcome such infections.

[2-4 weeks](#) – able to wobble around, eyes are open and very blue

Kittens at this age begin to resemble the adorable furballs we all adore. They should be fed 4-5 times a day by bottle at 2-3 weeks, transitioning as they get older to a flat dish. If the kittens are able to lap from a dish we recommend a high-grade wet kitten food (e.g. Iams, Nutro) mixed with KMR and turned into a "gruel". This should be warmed to help attract the kittens.

The older kittens may begin to show an interest in the litter box. Remember that kittens are like kids – everything goes in the mouth. So use a litter that doesn't clump! Clay based (large chunks, not scoopable!) litter or something corn or wheat based (e.g. Swheat) are best. Scoop often but if accidents occur, put solids in the litterbox to help the kitten "get the idea" where to go.

Continue to keep the kittens in a safe, confined area. It should be warm with no drafts, fumes, etc. Have a warm kitten bed available for them to curl up in together.

[4-8 weeks](#) – able to toddle around, gaining coordination with time; eating on their own; eyes are changing from blue to yellow or green (unless they have Siamese blue eyes)



Yahoo and Google at about 6 weeks

Continue to feed wet food supplemented with KMR, transitioning to canned food only, and add dry kitten food to the daily regimen. Dry food should be left out all day with fresh water close by. Keep using safe litters.

Give the kittens toys, toys, and more toys and remember to kitten proof wherever kittens go! NO wires to get tangled in, NO plants, NO drapes or cords, NO large bowls of water (drowning possibility).

Kittens should be confined in a safe area when no one is around. Older kittens may be allowed supervised explorations around the house.

Kittens should be dewormed at about 6 weeks of age with pyrantel or a similar gentle dewormer

### [8 weeks to 3 months +](#)

Feed kittens three to four times a day with a high-grade wet and dry food. Continue to use the safe litters and enjoy the fun of having kittens in your home!

Kittens this age are learning social skills. They need to play together to learn how to get along with each other. They need to interact with humans to learn how to behave properly. If your kitten wants to play too hard or grab you with her claws, substitute a stuffed toy. Don't play with her if she insists on using her claws; encourage her to play with "soft paws" (claws in). Make sure she is used to being picked up, having her claws trimmed, etc. This is the time to teach her to use a scratching post or flat cardboard scratcher (the Turbo Scratcher is a big favorite, providing kittens a toy and scratcher all in one).

Kittens should receive their first distemper vaccination at about 8 weeks of age, with a booster 3-4 weeks later. They should be dewormed again about 2 weeks after the first deworming. The rabies vaccination cannot be given until the kitten is 3-4 months old (ask your vet). Finally, please spay and neuter your kitten as soon as your vet recommends. Generally it should be done no later than 6 months old!