

# Foster Resources

\*If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Foster Department by phone: 410-235-8826 Ext. 147 or by email: [foster@mdspca.org](mailto:foster@mdspca.org).



## Kitten Basics Class

So, you're interested in becoming foster family for kittens—that's a great start! With the right knowledge and tools, you'll be surprised at how quickly you'll master everything from midnight feedings to litter training.

It may sound a little overwhelming at first, but with a little training and practice anyone can save kittens. No-one expects you to become a kitten-master overnight. The more information you have, the better prepared you'll be to make a major impact on animals' lives...and have a whole lot of fun while doing so!



## DETERMINING A KITTEN'S AGE

Knowing a kitten's age is the first step to figuring out what kind of care they need.

**TEENY TINIES** The tiniest, most vulnerable kittens require gentle and frequent care.

<b>NEWBORN</b>		<b>1 WEEK</b>		<b>2 WEEKS</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• pink in color, umbilical cord attached, eyes closed</li><li>• 97 degrees; can't regulate temp.</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• eyes closed, ears folded, no umbilical cord</li><li>• eyes open at 8-12 days</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• eyes completely open, blue color</li><li>• wobbly on their feet</li></ul>	

**TEENY WEANIES** As kittens age, you'll help them reach important developmental milestones.

<b>3 WEEKS</b>		<b>4 WEEKS</b>		<b>5 WEEKS</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• incisors emerging, ears unfolded</li><li>• discovering litterbox</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• canines emerging</li><li>• walking confidently &amp; exploring their surroundings</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• premolars emerging</li><li>• weaning slowly onto wet kitten food</li></ul>	

**BIG KIDS CLUB** These social, independent, and coordinated kittens are almost ready for adoption.

<b>6 WEEKS</b>		<b>7 WEEKS</b>		<b>8 WEEKS</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• molars emerging</li><li>• coordinated; like a miniature cat</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• all milk (deciduous) teeth have emerged</li><li>• transitioning into adult eye color</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• once 2 pounds, kittens can be spayed/neutered and placed in their forever home!</li></ul>	

Remember, all kittens are different: each one will vary in health, size, and development; therefore needs should be considered on a case-by-case basis. Physical traits such as weight and appearance are not always a precise indicator of age; developmental traits such as the presence of teeth, can more precisely determine a kitten's age. For instance, an emaciated 4-week-old may be the same weight as a 2-week-old kitten, but will have her canine teeth.

## KITTEN FOSTERING PREP

Before bringing home your first litter of kittens, you'll need to:

### 1. Decide what age-range you and your family can handle

### 2. Pick a space

- Small, safe, and easy to clean

Examples: bathroom, laundry room, spare room

### 3. Baby proof

- Kittens get into everything just like human babies. You'll want to thoroughly clean and baby-proof your foster room. (e.g. exposed wires, chemicals, choking hazards)

### 4. Gather your supplies

- The Maryland SPCA provides all the supplies necessary for fostering. You'll pick up supplies on your first visit.
- Keep an emergency kit at home



*Bottle Baby Foster, Melissa Baar's, "Kitten Kit"*



## STAYIN' ALIVE!

There is a fine line between life and death for kittens. When a kitten is without a mother, it's up to us to lend a hand—and a bottle. To make certain your foster kitten(s) thrive, you should keep tabs on their vitals.

### Vitals:

1. Appetite/ food intake
2. Hydration
3. Body Temperature
4. Socialization

An acronym we use in the shelter is BARH as a measure of general health. If your kitten's body functions are stable and regulated they should be BARH.

B— BRIGHT

A— ALERT

R— RESPONSIVE

H— HYDRATED



*Healthy Kitten*



*Unhealthy Kitten*

## A KITTEN'S GOTTA' EAT

Kittens don't instinctually know how to hunt for food, mom teaches them as they grow! As a surrogate mother, it is our job to teach kittens how to eat. When kittens aren't catching on, we need to make sure they are getting the nutrients necessary to survive.

I'm sure you've heard people say, "Oh, they'll eat when they're hungry." This is not always true for cats and especially not kittens. If they're picky, learning how to eat, don't feel well, or just outright don't feel like it, they won't eat. Here's where you come in.

### KITTEN WEIGHT AND FEEDING CHART

AGE	WEIGHT	AMOUNT PER FEEDING	SCHEDULE
0-1 week	50-150 grams	2-6 ml	Every 2 hours
1-2 weeks	150-250 grams	6-10 ml	Every 2-3 hours
2-3 weeks	250-350 grams	10-14 ml	Every 3-4 hours
3-4 weeks	350-450 grams	14-18 ml	Every 4-5 hours
4-5 weeks	450-550 grams	18-22 ml	Every 5-6 hours
5-8 weeks	550-850 grams	(weaning: offer ample wet food)	Every 6 hours

## WEIGHT YOUR KITTENS!

Small kitchen scales work the best for kittens. Amazon sells an electronic kitchen scale for \$11.99 and if you search "Kitten Scale" it is the first to pop up. Usually scales have a measurement option, make sure you're aware of whether you're weighing in grams or ounces. You may need to find a conversion chart on Google.

**Healthy kittens should gain 0.5 lbs. every two weeks.** Ideally, you will see a small increase every day.

## BOTTLE FEEDING

Just because you don't plan to foster bottle baby kittens doesn't mean you'll never have to pick up a bottle. Some kittens will outright refuse food and you'll need to pull out all the stops. Plus, why not learn a new skill?!

### What you'll need:

- KMR powder
- Bottle and nipple
- Whisk
- Stimulation towels

## STEPS TO BOTTLE SUCCESS:

**Disclaimer: NEVER try to feed a cold kitten! Make sure that your kitten is BARH and at a healthy temperature before you begin (temp should be between 99-102 degrees)**

1. **Mix** KMR powder with water.

- Most of the time you are going to mix **two** parts water to **one** part powder. Occasionally this will need to be tweaked if the kitten is having a hard time digesting.

2. **Fill** bottle— take note of how much is in there before you start.

3. **Warm.** Place bottle filled with milk in hot water— you want the milk to be body temperature (you can test the milk on the inside of your wrist, just like a human baby's bottle)

4. **Position.** To keep air from getting into its lungs or stomach hold the bottle at a **45 degree angle**. This is imperative. DO NOT hold the kitten on its back, like a baby, or they could aspirate. Kittens should be on their stomach as if they are nursing from a mother cat.

5. **Feed.** Open the mouth and slip the nipple in. Once the kitten latches on you will know!

6. **Calculate.** When kittens get fussy or stop suckling (they may just fall asleep) it's time to take a break. Don't forget to note how much is left in the bottle when he is finished!

Depending on whether the kitten ate enough before stopping, you might need to try again, or you can put your kitten down for a nap until the next feeding. Sometimes kittens just need a break and will be hungry a few minutes later—you can try stimulating or feeding a littermate—then try again.

### Helpful Feeding Tips

- Be sure you're holding the head and body stable to guide her. Kittens don't necessarily understand what you're trying to do, so it's up to you to hold them steady and show them.
- Take a look at your bottle and nipple, and make sure there are no issues such as a nipple that is cold, clogged, or cut too big/ too small.
- Wrap the kitten in a small baby blanket if needed to help her feel focused and swaddled; just make sure she is still in a proper belly-down position.
- Stimulate your kitten before and after each feeding so there's room in their bellies for more

## STIMULATION

As a stand-in momma cat, you'll need to make sure your kittens have room in their bellies for the next feeding. Be aware that food usually comes out looking the same as when it went in, so if your kittens are on a KMR diet, expect mostly liquid poop.

- Before and after feeding gently rub a soft, luke-warm towel over the kitten's PG-13 parts. You want to simulate a mother cat cleaning her baby's bottom.
- Kittens will almost always urinate every time they're stimulated, and should defecate about once a day.

## SYRINGE FEEDING

Appropriate use of a syringe, whether for administering medication or feeding, is something you'll definitely want to practice. Force-feeding can be very dangerous for a small kitten so take your time.

### Steps:

1. Weigh the kitten to see how much it needs to eat (see chart above).
2. Fill a 1, 3, 5, or 10 cc syringe with warmed KMR or gruel. The syringe size should be based on the size of the kitten and how much he is eating per feeding.
3. Syringe a few drops into the side of kitten's mouth and wait for the kitten to swallow.

**Tip:** Be sure to gently wipe KMR/gruel off the kitten's face and fur to avoid hair-loss and messy kittens.

## TRANSITIONING KITTENS

At about 3 ½ weeks kittens' teeth begin to break through their gums. When this happens they are ready to begin the transition to eating on their own. No matter the age, always start-off new foster kittens on "gruel."

### Making Gruel:

- Mix canned kitten food and warm water (or KMR) until it's the consistency of applesauce.
- Some kittens eat gruel right away while others may take some time to transition to solid food, be patient!
- Put a small dish in their playpen and guide them to it. Using a flat plate or dish is preferred so they don't put their entire head into the gruel.

### Recommended Kitten Edibles:

- Gerber meat-based baby food (no onion or garlic powder) can be used to entice kittens to eat; however human baby food doesn't have much nutritional value—so they cannot survive on baby food alone.
- Royal Canin Baby Cat
- IAMS kitten food

**Tip:** You can bottle/syringe feed (or use a small spoon and shallow dish/plate) to lure them closer to the dish.

## PHYSICAL HEALTH

As fosters, we want our kittens to be happy and healthy all of the time. Unfortunately, this wish isn't realistic. Whether they come to you sick, or face some sort of health issue down the line, it is important to be prepared to deal with sick kitties!

### **Warning Signs of Illness:**

- Lethargy (especially in a once active kitten)
- Stinky and/or excessively loose stool
- Loss of appetite or energy
- Drinking excessive amounts of water
- Ocular/Nasal Discharge sometimes paired with sneezing and fever
- Constipation or bloating (hard tummy, crying in the litterbox)

### **Dehydration**

When a kitten is not eating wet food, is vomiting, has diarrhea, or other illness it can quickly become dehydrated. Proper hydration is critical to good health.

- Skin tent test & Gum assessment
  - When pulled, skin should snap right back into place
  - Gums should be a healthy pink, and not white and/or 'sticky'
- If the kittens appears dehydrated, take their temperature and other vitals
- If the dehydration is severe, call the foster hotline for instruction

### **Diarrhea**

Get ready to scoop some poop! Your foster kittens are bound to have loose stool. Change of diet, stress, parasites and antibiotics are just a few reasons kittens experience tummy troubles. Although diarrhea is super common, we still want to keep an eye on our kitties output and seek treatment for any potential GI issues.

### **What do I do about loose poo?!**

- If your kittens are experiencing loose stool for over 48 hours and haven't been checked for parasites, drop a sample off at the shelter for testing.
- Try adding a probiotic powder to their food. Sometimes the tummy bugs are just off and need a little help regulating.
- Switch their food. It may not be agreeing with them.



## Upper Respiratory Infection (URI)

Upper respiratory infections (URIs) are common for kittens rescued from shelters or the outdoors due to their decreased immunity and the high risk of exposure to bacterial and viral agents.

Even though it's essentially just a common cold, a URI can be life-threatening for a baby kitten. Seek medical attention if you notice symptoms like sneezing with productive mucus, conjunctivitis, lethargy and/or fever.



### Tools to keep at home in case of kitten URI:

- Nebulizer
- Saline flushes
- Thermometer
- Stinky foods
- Gauze pads

## Panleukopenia

Panleukopenia is a parvovirus very similar in structure to canine parvovirus. It is highly contagious and extremely resistant to disinfectants and temperature extremes.

### Symptoms:

- Fever
- Fluctuating temperatures
- Lethargy/Depression
- Lack of appetite
- Vomiting/diarrhea
- Sudden death

**How is Panleukopenia diagnosed?** Panleuk incubates in the body for up to 14 days. Testing is not valid unless a kitten is symptomatic. If a foster kitten is showing these symptoms, you need to use extra precaution and have them tested right away.

**Treatment:** Unfortunately there is no "cure" for panleukopenia. Treatment is restricted to supportive therapy (fluids, antibiotics, syringe feeding.) Underage kittens are inherently immunosuppressed so many are unlikely to respond to treatment.

## Fading Kitten Syndrome:

Fading Kitten Syndrome (FKS) is a set of symptoms that cause a neonatal kitten not to thrive. While FKS is not a disease in and of itself, it is a series of life-threatening symptoms in which the kitten's health quickly

declines, and may lead to death without immediate intervention. In order to support kittens through these emergency situations, caregivers should learn the signs, monitor for symptoms, and have a plan ahead of time so that you know where to go for help—even if it's the middle of the night. This is why your “emergency kit” should always be stocked and easy to find at a moment’s notice.

### **Signs of FKS:**

- Agonal breathing (gaspings, labored open-mouth breathing)
- Pale gums
- Extreme lethargy
- Odd vocalizations (cries of pain)
- Muscle wasting (loss of muscle tone in the face and body, causing the kitten to look gaunt or frail. The kitten may develop a triangular looking face.)
- Decreased interest in food
- Loss of weight
- Dehydration
- Hypothermia or hyperthermia

### **Take immediate action!**

1. Hold the kitten and create friction by rubbing your hands up and down and side to side.
2. Get them warm and keep them warm.
  - Wrap the kitten up in a towel/blanket like burrito leaving only their face exposed. Their whole body should be in the towel. **DO NOT TAKE THEM OUT!**
  - Wrap a heating pad around the burrito on low or put the burrito on a warming disc.
  - As soon as the kitten is warmed you will need to work on raising its blood sugar.
3. Load a syringe with Karo syrup and give three drops every 5 seconds (do this 2-3 times only, it’s a delicate balance of raising the blood sugar without overdoing it. Do not administer Karo if the kitten is unresponsive.
4. If the kitten is not swallowing try rubbing the syrup on its gums. You can also do the same thing with nutrical.

**For more educational media, training resources, and instructional workshops to help you on your journey to save the lives of kittens—check out The Kitten Lady at [www.kittenlady.org](http://www.kittenlady.org).**