

2010

**Whisker**  
**RESCUE**

Foster Home  
Pet Parent Handbook



## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	4
What do foster homes do? .....	4
What are the requirements for becoming a foster home? .....	5
Which cats need foster care? .....	5
How long do cats spend in foster care?.....	5
How do foster cats find permanent adoptive homes? .....	5
Health Issues .....	5
Common Illnesses in Cats and Kittens .....	6
Panleukopenia (Feline Distemper).....	6
Upper Respiratory Infection (URI) .....	7
Rhinotracheitis .....	7
Calicivirus .....	7
Chlamydia .....	7
Ear Mites .....	8
Ringworm .....	8
Fleas .....	8
Round, Tape and Hook Worms .....	8
Cleaning Procedures .....	9
Routine Veterinary Care .....	9
Kitten Weight Chart .....	10
Cats & Kittens – Over 8 Weeks Old.....	11
Introduction .....	11
Supplies Needed .....	11
Behavioural Issues .....	11
Emergency Information .....	14
What constitutes an emergency? .....	14
Newborn Kittens (less than 8 weeks) .....	15

Introduction ..... 15

Supplies Needed ..... 15

Pregnancy, Labour & Birth ..... 16

Fading Kitten Syndrome..... 17

The First 8 Weeks of Life ..... 17

Socialization ..... 19

Weaning ..... 20

Litter Box Training ..... 20

Caring for Orphaned Kittens ..... 21

Feeding Orphaned Kittens ..... 22

# Introduction

- What do foster homes do?
- What are the requirements for becoming a foster home?
- Which cats need foster care?
- How long are cats in foster care?
- How do foster cats find permanent adoptive homes?
- Health Issues

## What do foster homes do?

Foster homes allow people to rescue homeless cats from a variety of situations by providing them with temporary care and shelter until they are adopted. Foster homes are asked to provide foster cats with plenty of love, adequate food and water, shelter from the elements and exercise. Administering medication may also be necessary. In addition to providing the basics, foster homes may also be asked to transport foster cats to veterinary appointments and adoption events. Foster homes will be provided with supplies, such as food, litter and toys and for any veterinary costs incurred in the care of the foster cat.

Foster homes play a crucial role in rehabilitating rescued cats. They are in a unique position to help abused or neglected animals learn how to love and trust again. Foster homes can help these cats become more “adoptable” by providing socialization and basic training. By teaching or re-teaching an animal to live in a home setting, foster homes help increase the odds for a smooth and successful transition into a permanent adoptive home.

In the case of orphaned kittens, foster homes provide surrogate parenting and round-the-clock care for tiny animals that are too young to survive on their own. By providing orphaned kittens with plenty of nutrition, love, and stimulation during their first eight weeks of life, foster homes help ensure their health and survival as adults. Foster homes save lives!

## **What are the requirements for becoming a foster home?**

Whisker Rescue is always looking for more foster homes. The only requirements are that a person love cats and have the time and resources to provide a foster cat with adequate care. Other requirements will vary depending upon the specific needs of a given foster cat. Some cats, for example, will need extra time commitments (as is the case with orphaned newborns), isolation from personal pets, etc.

## **Which cats need foster care?**

Foster homes are needed for adults, kittens, moms with newborns and orphaned newborns or for cats that are ill and/or need medical care. Many foster homes choose to specialize in fostering while others choose to foster whichever cat may be in need.

The majority of cats in need in foster care are rescued strays; needing plenty of love and reassurance that humans are not to be feared.

## **How long do cats spend in foster care?**

The time a cat needs to spend in foster care ranges anywhere from one night to several months and any time commitment a foster home can make is desperately needed and appreciated.

## **How do foster cats find permanent adoptive homes?**

Whisker Rescue Society takes full responsibility for finding permanent adoptive homes for their foster cats. Foster homes are encouraged to let people know that their foster cats are available for adoption. A person interested in adopting a cat needs to contact Whisker Rescue Society to complete the adoption application procedure.

Foster homes are asked to bring their foster cats to adoption events and are encouraged to stay as long as possible in order to provide information to potential adopters. Adoptions are handled on a case-by-case basis and every effort is made to match cats with homes that meet their specific needs. Foster homes can help immensely in this process by providing information regarding the cat's personality, training, time requirements and other needs. Any input given by a foster home is appreciated and taken into consideration during the adoption process.

## **Health Issues**

Because most foster cats are rescued as strays, it is very difficult to ensure that they will always be healthy. A cat appearing healthy at the time of rescue could easily begin to show signs of illness several days later. For this reason, **it is very important that foster homes keep their own cats up to date on vaccinations.** Because cats are relatively easy to keep separate from personal cats, we encourage foster homes to isolate foster cats in a separate room or large kennel for a period of two weeks following rescue. Most illnesses should be apparent within

those two weeks. It is further suggested that foster homes provide foster cats with separate food bowls, water bowls and litter boxes for the duration of their stay.

## Common Illnesses in Cats and Kittens

The following information is intended to help you better understand and recognize some of the more common illnesses in cats and kittens.

- Panleukopenia
- Upper Respiratory Infection (URI)
- Rhinotracheitis
- Calicivirus
- Clamydia
- Ear Mites
- Ringworm
- Fleas
- Round, Tape and Hookworms
- Cleaning Procedures
- Routine Veterinary Care
- Kitten Weight Chart

### Panleukopenia (Feline Distemper)

Panleukopenia (sometimes called feline distemper) is a viral infection that most commonly affects kittens and young cats. Left untreated, panleukopenia is almost always fatal. Even with intensive treatment, the majority of cats showing signs of panleukopenia will die.

Unfortunately, this illness can be frustrating to deal with because the virus can survive in the environment for up to a year. This means that other unvaccinated cats can become infected with panleukopenia simply by coming into contact with places where an infected cat has been.

A bleach solution is the best way to disinfect areas that may have been contaminated. The vaccine for panleukopenia is considered very effective.

**Signs and Symptoms:** Fever, diarrhea, lethargy, vomiting, loss of appetite

**Treatment:** Veterinary care including fluid therapy and antibiotics

**Transmission:** Very contagious to other cats, especially through contact with infected feces or vomit.

## Upper Respiratory Infection (URI)

The term, upper respiratory infection, is used to refer to any illness that affects a cat or kitten's upper respiratory system. URI's are very common in shelter cats. Some of the more serious URI's (for which there are vaccines) are listed separately in this section. Following is information that applies to all upper respiratory infections.

**Signs and Symptoms:** Sneezing, runny nose and eyes, fever

**Treatment:** Veterinary care including antibiotics

**Transmission:** Very contagious to other cats

## Rhinotracheitis

Rhinotracheitis is a type of upper respiratory infection. Rhino often infects cats and kittens that also have calicivirus. The vaccine for rhinotracheitis is considered very effective.

**Signs and Symptoms:** Sneezing, coughing, fever, runny nose and eyes

**Treatment:** Veterinary care including antibiotics

**Transmission:** Very contagious to other cats

## Calicivirus

Calicivirus is a virus that attacks the lungs and lower respiratory tract, usually causing pneumonia. Ulcers are often seen on the tongue and lips. The vaccine for calicivirus is considered very effective.

**Signs and Symptoms:** Loss of appetite, sneezing, runny nose & eyes, oral ulcers

**Treatment:** Veterinary care including antibiotics

**Transmission:** Very contagious to other cats

## Chlamydia

Also called pneumonitis, Chlamydia attacks the respiratory tract and produces conjunctivitis. Chlamydia is a bacterium. The vaccine for Chlamydia is considered very effective.

**Signs and Symptoms:** Loss of appetite, fever, nasal discharge, red eyes

<b>Treatment:</b>	Veterinary care including antibiotics
<b>Transmission:</b>	Very contagious to other cats

## Ear Mites

Ear mites are tiny parasites that live in the ear canal.

<b>Signs and Symptoms:</b>	Itching, scratching, head shaking, dark brown discharge in the ears
<b>Treatment:</b>	Veterinary care including an injection or ear meds
<b>Transmission:</b>	Contagious to other cats and dogs, but usually requires direct contact with the infected animal.

## Ringworm

Ringworm is a fungus related to athletes' foot, not actually a worm.

<b>Signs and Symptoms:</b>	Irregularly shaped areas of fur loss. The skin in these areas will usually appear rough and scaly.
<b>Treatment:</b>	Veterinary care including an injection and/or topical treatment.
<b>Transmission:</b>	Very contagious to other cats and people, but usually requires direct contact with the infected animal.

## Fleas

Fleas are tiny insects that feed on the blood of cats, humans and other animals. Although each flea only consumes a small drop of blood, fleas usually attack in large numbers. Fortunately, fleas are not common in our area.

<b>Signs and Symptoms:</b>	Intense itching and scratching
<b>Treatment:</b>	Veterinary care including an injection and/or topical treatment
<b>Transmission:</b>	Very contagious to other cats and people

## Round, Tape and Hook Worms

Worms affect a cat's digestive system. They are most commonly seen in kittens and young cats.

<b>Signs and Symptoms:</b>	Large belly, diarrhea and an inability to gain weight.
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<b>Treatment:</b>	Veterinary care including de-worming medication
<b>Transmission:</b>	Contagious to other cats, but only rough contact with (and subsequent ingestion of) feces

## Cleaning Procedures

It is important that all items and areas used by a sick foster cat be cleaned thoroughly. You can use a 10% bleach solution to reliably kill most viruses and bacteria. Items to be cleaned should be thoroughly wetted with the bleach solution and allowed to stand for several minutes before rinsing. Foster homes that have recently fostered a cat or kitten with panleukopenia (feline distemper) or another extremely contagious disease may be asked to wait several months or more before fostering another unvaccinated cat or kitten.

## Routine Veterinary Care

Whisker Rescue will provide foster cats with routine veterinary care prior to placement in permanent adoptive homes. The following schedule outlines the various types of routine care provided.

Procedure	Schedule
“Distemper Combo” vaccine (panleukopenia, rhinotracheitis & calicivirus)	Initial dose given shortly after rescue, to cats 8 weeks of age or older;  Booster given 3-4 weeks later.
Leukemia vaccine	Initial dose given shortly after rescue to kittens 8 weeks of age or older;  Booster given 3-4 weeks later.
De-worm	Initial dose given shortly after rescue;  Second dose given only if needed.
Spay/Neuter	Done shortly after rescue (kittens must be at least 8 weeks old and weigh at least 2 lbs),

In order to help ensure the health and safety of your foster cat, Whisker Rescue asks that you adhere to the guidelines set forth, including the following:

1. Always keep an ID tag attached to a properly fitted collar that will remain on your foster cat at all times;
2. Keep your foster cat indoors at all times; going outside only on a harness or into a secure cattery;

3. Advise Whisker Rescue if you are no longer able to care for your foster cat. **Do not** give your foster cat to another person without first receiving prior approval and permission from Whisker Rescue.

### **Kitten Weight Chart**

Age	Weight
Birth	3.0 to 3.7 oz ( 90 -110 grams)
2 weeks old	7.0 to 11.0 oz (200-300 grams)
3-4 weeks old	11.7 to 15 oz (350-450 grams)
5-7 weeks old	1 to 1.5 lbs (450-700 grams)
8 weeks old	1.7 to 2 lbs (800-900 grams)

# Cats & Kittens – Over 8 Weeks Old

- Introduction
- Supplies Needed
- Behavioural Issues

## Introduction

For many people, cats and kittens are the easiest kinds of animals to foster. They don't require a lot of time and yet they give plenty of love in return. Many foster homes find that they are even comfortable fostering more than one cat at a time. Whether you are interested in fostering one cat or many cats over time, the information in this chapter will help you to familiarize yourself with some of the common needs, behavioural issues and health concerns that are associated with fostering cats and kittens.

## Supplies Needed

Whisker Rescue will provide all supplies and the following is a checklist of items that required to foster a cat or kitten.

- ✓ Separate room or large kennel to keep foster kitty separate from personal pets for at least 2 weeks following rescue (this may vary depending on individual situations)
- ✓ Litter Box & litter
- ✓ Food and water bowls
- ✓ Scratching post and/or toys to help keep your foster kitty busy and away from your furniture and carpet.
- ✓ High quality cat or kitten food. It is a good idea to have both dry and canned food on hand in case you have a picky eater.
- ✓ Cat bed, blankets or towels to provide your foster kitty with a comfortable place to sleep.

## Behavioural Issues

It is common for a cat to experience some behavioural problems and need a period of adjustment when placed into a new environment. The following is a list of common behavioural problems as well as suggestions for behaviour modifications.

**Problem:** Aggression towards other cats

**Solution:** Prevent aggression before it occurs by introducing cats gradually. For instance, try placing the two cats on opposite sides of a door. Let them get used to each others' smell and sound before opening the door. You may even want to try pushing small treats under the door from one cat to another. The cats will think that the treats are coming from the cat on the

other side of the door. When you do introduce the cats, try to make sure that they are away from any area in your home where one cat may feel territorial (i.e. a favourite sleeping or eating place or a favourite toy). Taking these extra steps in the beginning will help ensure a smooth transition into your home.

**Problem:** Scratching furniture or carpet

**Solution:** Provide something appropriate for the cat to scratch. All cats scratch. The scratching motion allows the outer, frayed layers of the cat's nails to be removed. While it is very difficult to try and teach a cat not to scratch at all, it is quite easy to redirect the cat's scratching to a designated scratching post. Cats like to do most of their scratching activity right when they wake up. Keep this in mind and make sure that the scratching post you provide is near where the cat naps. If the cat insists on scratching in an inappropriate place, try using a squirt bottle to deter the cat from that location. With behaviour modification, do not scold the cat; just provide a quick squirt with the squirt bottle. You want the cat to associate the squirt with scratching in the inappropriate place, not with you. You can also try placing double-sided tape in the area where the cat likes to scratch. Cats don't like sticky surfaces and will usually leave the area alone.

**Problem:** Not using litter box

**Solution:** There are several common reasons why cats don't use their litter boxes. When introduced to a new environment, a cat may simply not know or remember where the litter box is located. Make sure to confine a new foster cat to a small area (like a laundry room or bathroom) for several days before allowing the cat to have more space. This will help ensure that the cat knows where to find the litter box when it is needed. It is also very important to keep the litter box as clean as possible. In general, cats are extremely clean animals and most cats will do their business elsewhere if their litter box becomes too soiled or if the litter box is too close to their food and/or water. If more than one cat is using the same litter box, it may be necessary to provide extra litter boxes so each cat can have its own. If none of these suggestions help, the problem may stem from a medical condition. Urinary tract infections are fairly common in cats and almost always result in litter box problems. If you suspect a urinary tract infection, contact the Whisker Rescue Society to set up a veterinary appointment.

**Problem:** Chewing on plants or other inappropriate items

**Solution:** There are a number of taste deterrents available on the market. Some companies even make formulas specifically for plants, furniture and other items. Taste deterrents are not that expensive and are usually pretty effective. You can also try using a squirt bottle to discourage cats from chewing on inappropriate items. Be aware that many plants are toxic to

cats when ingested. It is very important that you find an effective deterrent or move the plant(s) to an area that is not accessible to the cat(s).

**Note:** Cats do not respond well to punishment. When dealing with behavioural problems, focus on behaviour modification, not punishment. Physically punishing a cat won't do anything but damage the bond between human and cat.

# Emergency Information

- What constitutes an emergency?

## What constitutes an emergency?

An emergency is any situation in which a foster animals' life is in danger. The following are specific examples of emergency situations.

- ✓ **Illness** – If your foster cat becomes severely ill, please contact Whisker Rescue Society as soon as possible. Indications of severe illness include lethargy, severe vomiting and/or diarrhea, or signs that the animal is in pain.
- ✓ **Trauma** – If your foster cat sustains any kind of traumatic injury, please contact Whisker Rescue Society as soon as possible. If the injuries are severe, please take the foster cat immediately to:

**Deer Park Pet Hospital**  
**402 Allan Street**  
**Phone: 403.342.5200**

**Piper Creek Veterinary Hospital**  
**1, 166-37428 Range Road 273**  
**Phone: 403.346.8288**

- ✓ **Loss** – If your foster cat becomes lost, please contact Whisker Rescue as soon as possible and we will help you contact local animal control facilities. Whisker Rescue volunteers will also help, by searching, poster placement and putting an ad in the local newspaper(s) to help find the missing cat.

# Newborn Kittens (less than 8 weeks)

- Introduction
- Supplies needed
- Pregnancy, labour & birth
- Fading Kitten Syndrome
- The first 8 weeks of life
- Caring for orphaned kittens

## Introduction

Newborns, regardless of whether or not they are with their mother, have a very little chance of surviving in a shelter environment. Foster homes that foster mother cats with newborns provide a safe and healthy place for the kittens to grow and learn until they are old enough to be adopted. Foster homes that work with orphaned newborns provide everything a mother cat would provide. Orphaned kittens require 24 hour supervision and round-the-clock care. Fostering newborns of any kind is sure to be a challenging yet extremely rewarding experience.

## Supplies Needed

The following is a checklist of items that you will need to foster newborn kittens.

- Nest Box – you could use a cat carrier or a large cardboard box;
- Blankets and/or towels;
- 2 litter boxes – a large litter box for mom and a small litter box for the kittens when they are old enough (a cake pan or a box lid will also work fine);
- Litter – use clay litter not the clumping variety (supplied by Whisker Rescue);
- Food (supplied by Whisker Rescue) and water bowls;
- High quality kitten food – it's a good idea to have both dry and canned food on hand in case you have a picky eater;
- Kitten milk replacer (supplied by Whisker Rescue);
- Heating pad, hot water bottle or infrared lamp;
- Toys;
- Bottles for feeding orphaned or rejected kittens.

## **Pregnancy, Labour & Birth**

During her last week of pregnancy, a mother cat may not have a big appetite because the kittens are crowding her organs. Feed her several small meals daily rather than one or two larger meals. Leave dry cat food and water out at all times. If the mother cat will not eat the food provided, try mixing it with a small amount of tuna or other fish flavoured cat food.

Prepare a nesting box; place it in a dry, warm, relatively dark, draft-free and out of the way place. Place the mother cat in the box. If she does not want to stay, do not insist, but encourage her by petting her and giving her little food treats.

If your nursery room is not warm enough, wrap a heating pad in a towel, set it on the lowest setting and place it under the box so the mother has room to move away from the heat source if she chooses. You may consider wrapping duct tape around the cord; otherwise the kittens will be apt to chew on it.

### **Labour**

Before the delivery, the mother cat may become very irritable and restless. She will search for a place to have her kittens. Try to place her in the designated nesting box. She may choose another location to give birth, so it may be helpful to place the box in a room without any hiding places. Let her have the kittens outside of her next box if she chooses. When delivery is complete, you may then move the mother and the kittens into the box.

Some cats may want you to stay with them and will follow you if you leave. You will probably have to spend some time soothing this kind of cat. Often after the birth of the first couple of kittens, she will be very busy and not as dependent on your presence. Other cats will try to get away and hide when in labour. Give this kind of cat the space she needs to feel comfortable, but check up on her regularly.

### **Three Stages of Feline Labour**

**Stage 1:** The first stage may take 12 hours, during which the mother may purr or breathe rhythmically. She may become very active, dig at the floor, cry loudly and appear to be straining to use her litter box.

**Stage 2:** In the second stage, the water bag breaks and straw like fluid is passed. Delivery will begin a few minutes later. The mother cat will lick the newborn kitten clean and bite through the umbilical cord. She is bonding with her kittens through this process and learning to recognize them as her own. It is very important that you do not disturb her. It may appear as though she is too rough, but she is actually stimulating breathing and increasing blood circulation.



Stage 3: In the final stage, the placenta follows a few minutes after delivery of a kitten. The mother will probably eat some or all of the placentas.

## **Birth**

Kittens are born anywhere from 15-30 minutes apart; so most deliveries take 2-6 hours. The average litter is 4 to 5 kittens. The mother cat is probably finished giving birth if she seems calm and happy, although there have been some cases in which a cat resumed delivery sometime later. If a kitten is not born within 2 hours and the mother is continually straining or in distress you should seek emergency veterinary care as soon as possible.

## **Fading Kitten Syndrome**

Once in a while, one or more kittens that were healthy and vigorous at birth will begin to “fade” after several weeks of life. They will stop growing, begin to lose weight, stop nursing and stop crawling. They may cry continuously and lose the ability to stay upright. The mother cat may push them out of the nest, where they often chill and/or starve to death. Kittens fade very quickly and will not survive 48 hours without veterinary care. Most kittens will not recover without intensive care. There is no clear cause or reason for this condition. It has been linked to birth defects, environmental stress, mal-nutrition and infectious disease. Early detection and treatment is imperative, but even with tube feeding, re-hydration and monitoring many of these kittens will die.

## **The First 8 Weeks of Life**

### **Week 1**

- A nursing mother cat cannot be overfed. Food requirements can increase up to three times the normal amount. Leave food out for the mother cat at ALL times;
- The floor temperature of the nest box should be between 29 and 32 degree Celsius;
- The kitten’s ear canals open between 5 and 8 days old;
- The kittens should weight about 4 ounces and be handled minimally;
- Kittens will sleep 90% of the time and nurse from their mother the other 10%. They should nurse vigorously and littermates should compete for nipples;
- Kittens can nurse for up to 45 minutes at a time;
- Chilling is the number one danger to newborn kittens;
- Try to watch kittens nurse at least once a day. Make sure every kitten is nursing and there is not too much manoeuvring for position. A great deal of activity and crying could indicate a problem with milk flow or quality. When the mother cat re-enters the nest box, there should be fussing for only a few minutes before the kittens settle down.

## Week 2

- The floor temperature of the nest box should now be 26 - 29 degrees Celsius;
- The kittens should now weigh about 7 ounces;
- The kitten's eyes will open between 8 and 14 days. They open gradually, usually starting from the nose outward. Shorthaired cats' eyes usually open earlier than those with longer hair;
- All newborn kittens have blue eyes and initially no pupils can be distinguished. The eyes appear a solid, dark blue.

## Week 3

- The mother cat will begin to spend more time out of the nest;
- The floor temperature of the nest box should now be 23 – 26 degrees Celsius;
- The kittens should now weigh about 10 ounces;
- The kittens' ears will begin to stand erect;
- The kittens should now be spending only 60-70% of their time sleeping;
- Kittens generally begin to crawl around day 18 and can usually stand by day 21;
- The kitten's milk teeth will begin to cut;
- Kittens will begin to play with each other, learn to sit and will start trying to touch objects with their paws;
- During week 3, kittens should begin their socialization phase. Start to increase the amount of handling the kittens receive and try to accustom them to human contact. Avoid exposing them to anything frightening.

## Week 4

- The floor temperature of the nest box should be 21 -24 degrees Celsius from this point forward;
- The kittens should now weigh about 13 ounces;
- Adult eye colour will begin to appear, although it may not be final for another 9 – 12 weeks. The kittens will begin to develop complete sound and sight orientation.
- Kittens will begin to clean themselves, although their mother will continue to do most of the serious cleaning;
- Kittens can begin to eat from a shallow saucer and should be weaned gradually from their mother's milk. The mother cat will usually begin to discourage her kittens from nursing: however, some cats (particularly those with smaller litters) will allow nursing until the kittens are around two months old; ***(please see weaning notes on page 20)***

- Sometimes nursing activity is done just for comfort. Even if the kittens appear to be nursing, they may not be receiving all the nutrition they need. Make sure they are eating and gaining weight;
- It is also at this time that kittens will begin to eliminate on their own. Supply a small, low litter box and fill it with clay litter. Do NOT use the clumping variety: it is hard to clean and it is harmful if ingested.

#### Week 5

- The kittens now weigh about 1 pound;
- The male kittens' testicles will become visible;
- The kittens should be very active and be able to get out of the nest;
- Weaning and litter box training should continue.

#### Week 6

- The kittens should now weigh about 1.25 pounds;
- The kittens should have complete visual abilities. They will imitate their mother, use scratching posts, and explore the world around them;
- Continue the weaning process by thickening the gruel. Begin to introduce solid food.

#### Week 7

- The kittens now weigh about 1.5 pounds;
- Nursing sessions should be brief and infrequent, if they take place at all;
- The kittens should now eat undiluted kitten food. Continue to encourage the kittens to eat dry food. Dry food is good for their teeth and will likely be what they are fed in their adoptive homes.

#### Week 8

- By the end of week 8 the kittens should weigh 2 pounds and be ready to be spayed or neutered.

### **Socialization**

It is your job to help convince the kittens that humans are kind and loving. Some kittens will adjust to you and their new environment quickly, while others may seem frightened and intimidated. To help the kittens get used to you, try sitting down in the middle of a room while making phone calls. They will hear the sound of your voice, but not be threatened by it. Familiarize them with the sound of the television and radio. When the kittens are nearly four weeks old, they are ready to socialize with you and each other. Try to play with your kittens daily. The outgoing and friendly kittens will be easy to play with; however, some will need a

little encouragement. If your kittens are afraid and run away when you approach, try sitting or lying on the floor near them and let them come to you. When you pick a kitten up, stroke the kitten gently and speak to it in a soft tone. You want this to be a pleasant experience, so put the kitten down if it begins squirming a lot. With patience and love, most young kittens will come to tolerate and even enjoy the company of humans.

## **Weaning**

At about 4 weeks of age, the kittens will probably start showing interest in their mom's food. Introduce the kittens to solid food by offering warmed canned food mixed into a thin gruel with a little bit of water or kitten milk replacer. Place the food in a shallow saucer. Some kittens will begin lapping right away, while other will prefer to lick the gruel from your fingers. Allow them to do so and slowly lower your finger to the saucer. The kittens may bite the edge of the plate or walk in the food. Sometimes it takes two or three meals or more before they really catch on. If a kitten doesn't seem interested in the gruel at all, try gently opening the kitten's mouth and rubbing a little of the food on its tongue or teeth. Be patient, the weaning process takes time. As the kittens catch on, begin to thicken the gruel in the proceeding weeks. Remember that as you thicken the gruel, you will need to make sure the kittens always have access to fresh water in a low, spill-resistant bowl.

By about 6 weeks of age, the kittens should be getting most of their nutrition from the food you are providing. The kittens should be fed at least 3 meals a day. Their stomachs are small (roughly the size of an acorn) and so they may not eat much at a single sitting. In order to receive adequate nutrition, the kittens require small, frequent feedings. Gradually introduce the kittens to dry food by mixing it in with their gruel. By the end of 8 weeks, the kittens should be content to eat dry food alone.

***Do not feed the kittens cow's milk or other human foods. Cats and kittens have different nutritional needs than humans and can become ill when give some human foods.***

## **Litter Box Training**

When the kittens reach about 4 weeks of age, they will begin to eliminate on their own. You can create a small litter box out of a cake pan or box lid. Be sure to use clay litter only and avoid exposing the kittens to the clumping variety (it is not unusual for kittens to eat litter, and the clumping variety can be dangerous if ingested). Most kittens learn from watching mom and will use the litter box from the start. You can encourage the kittens by showing them the litter several times a day, especially after meals and naps. Gently take their paw and scratch at the litter. Be sure to praise the kittens when they start using their box. It is of course, common for young kittens to make mistakes. If you find that a kitten has defecated outside of the litter box, pick up the stool with a tissue and place the stool into the litter box. This should help remind

the kittens where they are supposed to eliminate. It is a good idea to confine the kittens to a relatively small area because they may forget where the litter box is located if they have too much room. Be sure to always keep the litter box clean and away from their food.

## **Caring for Orphaned Kittens**

Sometimes circumstances occur where newborn kittens are orphaned. Success with raising these newborns is based on following basic procedures and keeping important elements in mind. Successful rearing of orphaned kittens requires providing them with a suitable environment, the correct quantities of nutrients for different stages of growth, and a regular schedule of feeding, sleeping, grooming and exercise. You must also provide the stimulus for urination and defecation during the first 18-21 days of life. Do this by massaging the abdomen and perianal area after each feeding with a cotton ball or very soft washcloth, dampened with warm water (you do not want to irritate the area). You can also use mineral oil on a cotton ball to stimulate the bowels. Kittens, after 4 weeks of age, can usually eliminate without assistance.

You must also maintain their body warmth, as kittens do not have the ability to regulate and control their body temperature. Keep them out of drafts if necessary; use a 250 watt infrared heat bulb suspended above the crate. If you need to use a heating pad, place it in front of their sleeping area, at the opening of the crate and cover it with several layers of towels.

Kitten bedding must be changed daily, and sometimes more often. Wash dirty bedding with a little bleach to disinfect.

Kittens need exercise to promote muscular and circulatory development, however care should be taken in the first two weeks of life as their internal organs and limbs are extremely fragile. Play with and handle them prior to feeding at least twice a week or more often. Groom each kitten with a soft, warm and moist cloth, wiping gently to imitating the mother's grooming licks.

Whisker Rescue will provide all the kitten milk replacer that you will need as cow's milk is not nutritious enough for kittens. They will slowly starve to death on cow's milk.

Test temperature before feeding. It should be warm without burning; around 30 degrees Celsius. Never boil food to heat as it will destroy the nutritional value. Placing the bottle in hot water for a few minutes or putting it in the microwave for no more than 10 seconds can also accomplish warming.

If constipation occurs, add 1 drop of vegetable oil to each kittens' feeding no more than once daily until the problem is eased. Overfeeding can cause diarrhea and a host of other problems.

Hand feeding can be challenging and yet very rewarding. Everyone who has done this has developed a method that works best for them and you will too. Whether you use a kitten baby

bottle or syringe, it is best to keep the kitten in a position similar to what they would experience if mama were there. In other words, don't turn the kittens on their back and remember to keep the bottle at a 45 degree angle to reduce the amount of air getting into the kitten's stomach.

## **Feeding Orphaned Kittens**

Feeding equipment needs to be sterilized before and between feedings. Do this by dipping the equipment in boiling water and sterilize your hands before and after feedings.

Feeding should occur every 2 hours until the 3<sup>rd</sup> week, and every 4 hours at night (for your sanity). Below is a general guideline for how much to feed and when for their first four weeks of life.

<b>Week of Life</b>	<b>Amount to Feed</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> week	3.7 cc's per ounce of body weight
2 <sup>nd</sup> week	4.9 cc's per ounce of body weight
3 <sup>rd</sup> week	5.7 cc's per ounce of body weight
4 <sup>th</sup> week	6.3 cc's per ounce of body weight

As long as the kitten does not cry excessively, gains weight and feels firm to the touch, the diet is meeting their nutritional needs. After each feeding session, you should give them a full body once over with a barely damp washcloth, using short strokes like mom would use. This keeps their fur clean, teaches them how to groom and gives them the attention and mothering they crave.