

KITTENS

Found Newborn Kittens? Warmth, Feeding and Care for the First Weeks

Neonatal kittens cannot keep themselves warm or go to the bathroom alone. What to do first, and how to feed and care for them.

By Catt County Cat Nippers • Reviewed October 15, 2026 • 1 min read • 3 cited sources

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First: is the mother nearby?

Mothers often leave kittens to hunt. Unless the kittens are in danger, watch from a distance for a few hours before taking them. A mother's care is their best chance. If you do take them, call a vet or us for help.

Warm before you feed

Kittens cannot regulate their own body temperature until about three weeks old. A chilled kitten must be warmed gradually before any food: use a covered heating pad on low under half of a box (so they can move off it) or a wrapped warm water bottle.

Feeding

- Use kitten milk replacer (KMR) from a pet store or vet. Never cow's milk.
- Warm formula to about 100°F; it should feel warm on your wrist.
- Feed with the kitten on its belly, never on its back, and let it suckle. Do not squeeze formula into its mouth: it can enter the lungs.
- Newborns eat every 2–3 hours around the clock, spreading out as they grow. The belly should feel full but not tight.
- Weigh each kitten before feeding and write it down.

Helping them go to the bathroom

Until about four weeks old, kittens must be stimulated to urinate and defecate. Before or after each feeding, gently rub the genital area with a warm, damp soft cloth or cotton ball for up to about a minute.

See a vet the same day if a kitten will not eat, stops gaining or loses weight, has not urinated in 12 hours, has not passed stool in 2 days, or has diarrhea or trouble breathing.

Checklist

- ☐ Warm nest with a covered heating pad on low
- ☐ Kitten milk replacer (KMR) and bottle
- ☐ Kitchen scale and a log sheet
- ☐ Soft cloths for stimulating
- ☐ Vet phone number

Sources

1. Alley Cat Allies — Neonatal Kitten Care (PDF)

<https://humanepro.org/sites/default/files/documents/neonatal-kitten-care.pdf>

2. ASPCA — Kitten Bottle Feeding Guide (PDF)

<https://www.aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/aspc-kitten-bottlefeeding-guide.pdf>

3. Best Friends Animal Society — Bottle-Feeding Kittens

<https://bestfriends.org/pet-care-resources/bottle-feeding-kittens-comprehensive-guide>