

# Hand-Raising Orphaned Kitten(s)

By Kathleen M. Gallagher



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This manual is being written in celebration of the hundreds of orphan kittens that I have fostered during the past decade. It is designed to help people who are trying to raise orphan kitten(s); it explains many of the emergency problems and assists with ideas for everyday care. The work involved in raising an orphan kitten is sometimes hard but the results are extremely rewarding.

Most organizations rely on the people who find orphaned kittens or others to care for them until they are ready for adoption. This guide will help you be successful in giving them the best chance possible for good health and preparation to live with a family.

Though the majority of orphan kittens that I have raised have done well, many have died for a variety of reasons. Few will have a 100% success rate in rearing these fragile kittens. The sorrow for the ones that I have lost is replaced with the exhilarating experience of raising a kitten from birth to weaning and then into their new homes. Of course, several of the orphan kittens that I helped raise became permanent residents of my own household. The little orphans have a habit of stealing your heart.

I am not a veterinarian; my skills come from years of practical experience and the advice of many veterinarians. This manual is not intended to be a substitute for veterinary care but an aid that will assist in the raising of the orphan kitten(s).

**Always consult your veterinarian as they are the experts in the field of animal health and welfare!**

## Supplies Needed To Care of Orphan Kittens

<b>Ideal Situation</b>	<b>Emergency</b>
<b>Heating Pad</b>	<b>Hot Water Bottle or Surgical Glove filled with warm water and tied</b>
<b>Small Nursing Bottle</b>	<b>Eye Dropper or Syringe</b>
<b>Cotton Balls or Tissue</b>	<b>Toilet Paper/Paper Towel</b>
<b>Soft Fabric, Diaper or Material without loops</b>	<b>Newspaper, Cloth Towel or Paper Towel</b>
<b>KMR Formula or Just Born Formula (Available at Pet Stores or your Veterinarian)</b>	<b>Cow's Milk mixed with an egg yolk or Human Infant Formula (Short-term Emergency Only)</b>
<b>Thermometer Ideal Temperature 100° to 102° °</b>	<b>Your hands/ Kitten feels cold to the touch</b>
<b>Karo Syrup</b>	<b>NEVER USE SUGAR</b>
<b>Small Litter Box or Metal Pan (For Kittens 3 to 4 weeks old)</b>	<b>Shoebbox, Gift box, etc.</b>
<b>Non-Clumping Litter</b>	<b>Shredded Newspaper</b>
<b>Alarm Clock to simulate mother's heartbeat</b>	<b>Kitten held close to your heart or Old fashion wind up watch</b>
<b>Pedialyte Fluid for Infants</b>	<b>Water</b>
<b>Stuffed Animal (Single Kitten)</b>	<b>Rolled up Towel for Security &amp; Warmth</b>
<b>Vaseline or K-Y Gel</b>	<b>Vegetable or Corn Oil</b>
<b>Animal Carrier</b>	<b>Cardboard Box</b>

## **GUIDELINES FOR DAILY CARE OF YOUR KITTEN (S)**

- **Warmth** - Keep the kitten warm. Ideal body temperature should be between 100° to 102°. Kitten should be kept on a heating pad set on low setting that has been covered with a clean soft fabric until the kitten is at least 3 to 4 weeks of age. If the kitten is older than 3 to 4 weeks and the temperature in the room is below 70°, continue to keep the kitten on a heating pad. Always make sure that there is a small area in the animal carrier or box that is heating pad free. If the temperature is too warm for the older kitten, she can go to the cooler area of the carrier or box.
- **Food (Formula)** - If kitten is under one week of age or malnourished, mix one part Kitten Formula (KMR, etc.) with 2 parts warm water and mix thoroughly. For kittens two weeks of age and older, mix 2 parts formula to 3 parts of warm water and mix thoroughly. Puncture hole in top of nipple of pet nursing bottle with sharp instrument or carefully cut small hole in top of nipple (do not make hole too large or too small; follow directions on bottle from manufacturer). Pour mixture into clean & sterilized plastic nursing bottle and tighten cap for nipple. Test temperature of mixture on wrist, kitten will prefer the mixture to be very warm, *not* hot (Body temperature of her mother would be about 102° and the mother's milk would be the same temperature.) Hold kitten upright swaddled with a warm towel or on its stomach standing on a warm towel with head extended.



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**NEVER ATTEMPT TO FEED KITENS WHEN THEY ARE ON THEIR BACKS LIKE HUMAN INFANTS.** Before putting the bottle in the kitten's mouth, squeeze the pet bottle to allow a drop of formula to wet the tip of the bottle. Place the nipple of the bottle in the kitten's mouth pointed toward the throat and slowly move the nipple back and forth. The motion should entice the kitten to nurse and the kitten should start nursing from the bottle. If the kitten does not nurse, repeat back and forth motion several times. If kitten still does not nurse, wait a few minutes and try again. Once the kitten starts nursing it will nurse for several minutes. If the bottle appears to be collapsing there is too much air and the suction needs to be interrupted by gently pulling nipple from kitten's mouth.

Kittens usually stop nursing when they have full stomachs. If you're feeding a litter of kittens, after you have finished feeding the entire litter you can offer each the bottle again or if it's a single kitten, wait a few minutes then offer the bottle again, if the kitten refuses to eat again, it usually means the kitten is full. Kittens should be fed every 3 to 4 hours. If the kitten is eating well and appears healthy, feeding the kitten through the night is not always necessary. A healthy kitten can go for a period of 6 to 7 hours through the night without formula or food. Kittens usually stop nursing when they have full stomachs. If the kitten appears active and healthy but will not nurse, wait for 2 to 3 hours and attempt feeding the kitten again. If the kitten does not nurse after 6 hours – See "Emergency Care Section-Feeding Instructions."

Introduction of Solid Food: Between 3½ to 4 weeks of age, you can try introducing the kitten to solid food. Increase the size of hole in the nipple and mix in ¼ teaspoon wet kitten food to formula, gradually increase the kitten food by adding an additional ¼ teaspoon every 3 days making sure the kitten is tolerating the new food addition by monitoring the kitten's stools. If kitten's stools appear loose or diarrhea is present, reduce the amount of kitten food added to the formula until the system of the kitten is able to tolerate the wet kitten food.

At approximately 4 to 5 weeks of age offer a free choice of water & crushed dry kitten food (I recommend Royal Canin Baby Kitten 34, it does not need crushing) and mix KMR Formula with dry food and feed periodically (Once a day or once every other day). Free choice means a small bowl of fresh water & dry food is placed in the kitten's area and the kitten may eat or drink at any time it chooses.

- **Toilet needs** – Kittens under the age of 2 weeks cannot urinate nor have a bowel movement without the stimulation from their human caretaker. With a soft tissue or cotton ball moistened with warm water, gently rub or tickle the genital and anus area of the kitten. This method is the only way that the kitten can eliminate its body waste and must be used before & after each feeding and until the kitten is litter trained. The kitten should urinate at each feeding following stimulation and bowel movements can be every day to every 2 to 3 days.

**Litter Training** – Kittens are litter trained between the ages of 3 to 4 weeks. Place a very small litter box or small cardboard box with a small entry way cut in the box;

fill it with a small amount of non-clumping cat litter and a previously used cotton ball or tissue that the kitten eliminated on. It's that easy, kitten will start using the litter box in a very short time.

**Special Note:** Never use clumping cat litter, a kitten could ingest it and suffer severe health problems, even death. If non-clumping cat litter is not available, use shredded newspaper without colored advertising section.

**Loose Stools or Diarrhea** - Decrease the amount of formula fed to each kitten by 25% and add one-teaspoon "plain" yogurt to the formula. As stated above, if the kitten has started on wet kitten food and develops loose bowels or diarrhea, decrease the amount of wet food added to formula until the kitten's system can tolerate the rich kitten food. If the rectum area appears red and irritated, you may apply a small amount of Vaseline on the area to assist with discomfort. Consult your veterinarian if diarrhea is severe or present for longer than 24 hours.

- **Clean & dry -**

1. Kitten should be given clean, dry and fresh bedding every day. It may be necessary to change the bedding several times a day if kitten has any accidents.
2. Kittens may be lightly washed with warm water and towel dried or a moistened warm washcloth may be used to wash faces, necks and paws after eating. "Do not use soap". If the kitten's rectum area and surrounding fur is soiled from loose stools or diarrhea, wash the rectum area under warm running water.
3. All bedding should be washed with detergent, bleach and a little fabric conditioner.
4. Wash your hands before & after each feeding and after changing the kitten's bedding.
5. If kitten is housed in an animal carrier-Disinfect carrier by using 1 part bleach to 32 parts water (1 oz. to 1 gallon water), thoroughly dry and air before returning kitten to carrier.
6. If kitten is housed in a cardboard box-Change cardboard box several times per week and when cardboard box is soiled.

- **Isolate** – Keep your orphan kitten separate from your household pets until a veterinarian has checked the kitten. If you have decided to keep your orphan kitten, your vet will advise on the length of isolation and the introduction process. If your intention is not to keep the kitten, interaction with your household pet(s) is not recommended.

- **Love** – Your orphan kitten needs lots of your love. Orphaned at birth or shortly following birth, your kitten experienced a tremendous loss. It's your job as the substitute (foster) mom to help the kitten over this stressful period. At approximately 3 to 4 weeks of age, your kitten will start exploring and playing. At this point you can introduce toys to your kitten. Of course, she'll need someone to help her with playtime and that someone will be you. Allow yourself plenty of time to play with your kitten. At the age of 6 to 7 weeks the kittens may start playing very rough. If the

kitten is playing too rough with you, hold the kitten on its side with both hands until the kitten realizes that rough play is “not acceptable”. The kitten’s mom would have disciplined the kitten but now it is your responsibility. Kittens are small & fragile, always be gentle with your touch.

- **Inoculate**

Kittens should be taken to the veterinarian between the ages of 5 to 6 weeks to be inoculated against disease. Kittens that did not receive Colostrum (first milk received from their mothers which is rich in antibodies to help fight disease) will need their inoculations earlier than kittens raised by their mothers.

**Safety Tips:**

1. **Do not let small children handle kittens; they can easily injure the kitten or themselves. Children need to be instructed the proper handling procedures for the kitten.**
2. **Very young kittens should not be handled by anyone unless they have washed their hands. Kittens are easily susceptible to disease, bacterial & viral infections. Keep them and their surroundings clean.**
3. **REMEMBER - Isolation is very important for the health of your other household pets!**

## **Emergency Care**

### **Crisis Situation**

**COLD KITTEN:**

**If a thermometer is available, lubricate with Vaseline and insert tip of thermometer into rectum. Normal body temperature should be 100° to 102°. If kitten’s body temperature is below 100° or feels very cold to the touch (if the thermometer is not available) follow the instructions listed below:**

1. Slowly raise body temperature by placing the kitten on a heating pad at a low setting that is covered with a clean dry towel; turn kitten from side to side every 5 minutes to warm. (To prevent risk of burns, a heating pad can be placed under the box or carrier or latex gloves filled with warm water & tied).
2. Massage kitten with hand rubbing over kitten’s entire body (natural response from kitten’s mom would be licking to stimulate blood flow and organs).
3. When body temperature returns to normal, follow feeding instructions.

## **EXTREMELY COLD KITTEN:**



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### **If body temperature is below 99° or if the kitten feels extremely cold to the touch:**

1. Place kitten on heating pad set on medium setting, not high, (if you raise the temperature too quickly, internal damage can result) that is covered with a clean, dry towel; turn kitten from side to side every 5 minutes to warm.
2. Change towels as needed for dryness.
3. Massage kitten with hand rubbing to stimulate blood flow.
4. When body temperature returns to normal, set heating pad setting to low and proceed with feeding instructions.

### **FEEDING INSTRUCTIONS, FOR EMERGENCY CARE:**

- Body Temperature has returned to normal and/or
- Kitten is Weak and Lethargic
- Kitten has missed two or more feedings

### **DO NOT ATTEMPT TO FEED A CHILLED KITTEN “FORMULA” UNTIL THE BODY TEMPERATURE RETURNS TO NORMAL. Feeding a cold kitten can result in damage to the liver & kidneys.**

1. Prepare mixture of 1 part Karo Syrup and 3 parts of water or Pedialyte (if available) and pour into a sterilized nursing bottle. \*Instructions for bottle preparation are listed under Food (Formula)-“Guidelines for Daily Care of Your Kitten Section.” Prior to putting the bottle in the kitten’s mouth, squeeze a drop of mixture to wet the tip of the bottle. Place the nipple of the bottle in the kitten’s mouth and move back & forth. If kitten is unable to nurse from bottle, administer mixture with eyedropper. **Use extreme caution when using an eyedropper**, too much liquid at one time can collect in kitten’s lungs and result in aspiration pneumonia. Never squeeze the bottle or eyedropper; gently dispense in drops on the kitten’s tongue, waiting for the kitten to swallow before the next drops are placed on the tongue.
2. Feed again in ½ hour then feed in 1-hour intervals for 3 or 4 additional feedings. Then start diluted formula of 1 part KMR Formula to 2 parts of warm water. After kittens

are one week old or no longer severely malnourished and are stabilized, prepare formula by mixing 2 parts KMR Formula to 3 parts of warm water.

## **Common Problems & Suggestions:**

### **DIARRHEA**

Remember the kitten has survived a very stressful situation and may develop diarrhea. If diarrhea occurs add a ¼ teaspoon of “plain” yogurt at each feeding and reduce the amount of food intake by 25% until the diarrhea stops. If diarrhea is severe or lasts longer than 24 hours, contact your veterinarian immediately. In a healthy kitten, stress, overeating or parasites are the main reason diarrhea will occur.

### **STRESS LEVEL**

A manual alarm clock could also be helpful to help reduce the stress level. The ticking of the clock mimics the mother’s heartbeat. You’re trying to make the kitten as calm as possible. She’s experienced a tremendous amount of stress and you helping to keep her calm will improve her overall health.

### **FLEAS**

Severe infestation of fleas can make a kitten anemic and even kill very young kittens & adult cats. Kittens fewer than six weeks of age should not be bathed with flea shampoo or be treated with Revolution, Advantage, etc. Absolutely no over the counter products, including shampoos are to be used. Instead, kittens fewer than six weeks of age should be bathed with warm water (exercise caution-water should not enter kittens mouth or nose), combing the fur with a fine tooth comb and drowning the fleas in alcohol or soapy water. This procedure should be repeated several times until the fleas or majority of fleas are no longer present. Following the bath, towel dry kitten; or if less than 7 days old, a hairdryer on low setting may be used to speed up the length of the drying time and the kitten should be placed on a clean, dry towel with a heating pad placed on low under the towel. If necessary, repeat this procedure until all signs of fleas have disappeared.

### **EAR MITES**

Check ears for mites. Kitten’s ear canals are closed at birth and canals do not open until kittens are 5 to 12 days old, which is about the same time their eyes open. Mites are usually present if very crusty dark colored wax with a coffee ground consistency is found in the ears. A veterinarian can diagnose ear mites by placing a sample of wax under the microscope. Ear mites are not contagious to adults or children.

### **RINGWORM**

A fungus, not a worm, ringworm is contagious to humans and other pets. Spores in the environment can lead to environmental contamination, recontamination of kitten or other animals/people in household. Therefore, you need to isolate infected kittens. Ringworm typically appears as a round skin lesion with areas of hair loss, usually on the ears, head



or paws. The infected areas may look scaly. Your veterinarian can diagnose ringworm by using a black light, which is not a definitive test, or by a fungal culture or a microscopic examination. Treatment can be either Systemic (Oral) or Topical (On top of the skin). Until you receive a diagnosis from a veterinarian, if the kitten has signs of circular, scaly patches of hair loss, use gloves and protective clothing when handling, feeding & cleaning the kitten. Disinfect all objects (1 part bleach to 10 parts water) that have come in contact with the kitten.

### **EYE PROBLEMS**

The kitten's eye or eyes might become closed from an eye infection and the lid may be closed. Moisten a cotton ball or tissue with warm water and gently cleanse the eye area. Do this several times per day and seek the help of a veterinarian who will decide if an eye antibiotic is necessary.

### **ISOLATION**

Keep kitten away from all pets until checked by a veterinarian. The vet will advise on period of isolation, depending on the health and length of time that the kitten has been isolated.

**Thank you for doing life saving work – for giving life . . . .**



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