

# Kitten Care Guide

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**A Rescue Workers Pledge: Give me the helpless, the lost, the homeless wee ones struggling just to live, the innocent refuse of an uncaring land. Send these, the weak abandoned lives to me - I offer warmth, care, hope and love.**



**But they're so tiny....**

**Welcome to the hardest job you'll ever love!**

**The best part of my job, working with Homeless Cats, is caring for the newborns. This is not an easy task but a more rewarding one I've yet to find. I always say if people would spay/neuter their animals they just might put me out of business but somehow I doubt that will ever happen. Just how do you raise a newborn? Relatively easy, relax and do it.**

**The most important thing to remember is: treat these babies just like they are newborn humans. Clean, clean and clean some more. I keep antibacterial soap in dispensers all over my house and always wash my hands before I handle a baby and right after. I wash their blankets and towels every morning in hot soapy bleach water just to insure I'm not harboring or spreading any disease or bugs.**

**All Mammals are born with sterile digestive tracts. They get the needed bacteria from mom's milk and off her nipples. If you get a baby that has not been with Mom they NEED friendly bacteria. I use Bene-Bac which I buy on the Web. Once can also use Baby Jarro-dophilus - also found on the web. I always use a powder formula that has colostrums in it with neo-natal's. You really cannot have to many safety tips when dealing with these tiny beings.**

**The second most important thing to remember is these babies need to be kept warm, hydrated and fed. They are kept warm by different methods, my favorite being a heat lamp placed over the carrier you have them in. Make a nest for them using soft and warm blankets. Another method is to place a heating pad, on **LOW**, covered by a towel and then the blanket and then the baby. You don't want to cook them, just keep them warm. Be sure to provide a "cool" spot for the kittens to crawl to if they get to warm.**

**You can tell their age very approximately by several methods. If they still have their umbilical cords they are probably between 1 and 4 days old. If their eyes are still closed they are probably between 1 and 10 days old. By 12-14 days their eyes should be open. Open their mouths and look for teeth. Do you see little nubs coming in? About 2 weeks. Are they attempting to stand? Possibly 2 to 3 weeks. Are they starting to play? Figure their age at about 4 weeks.**

**Newborn kittens do not drink cows milk. There are several formulas available at pet stores, ie: K.M.R., Nurtuall, Just Born or you can use Goats Milk. I prefer the powdered formula but this is really a matter of preference. The**

formula is given at body temp, never cold, through a nursing bottle. This is also available at pet stores. To place it in the kittens mouth simply open her/his mouth and stick the bottle in. You may have to give it a little squeeze to start the milk flowing. Do not hold the kitten as you would a newborn baby. They must be placed prone on your lap and fed exactly in that position. The kitten should naturally suckle. **PLEASE BE SURE THEY ARE IN A PRONE POSITION, IF NOT, YOU TAKE A BIG CHANCE OF PUTTING FORMULA DIRECTLY INTO THEIR LUNGS. PRONE IS; FOUR FEET ON YOUR LAP - TILT THEIR HEAD UP TO GET THE NIPPLE.**

A kitten that is cold should not be fed right away, rather, you should place it next to your skin and warm it. Feed it Pedialyte: 1 cc. per 2 ounces of body weight, every hour and warm slowly until the Kitten is warm and wiggling. After the kitten is warm feed it formula. When chilled the stomach and small intestines stop working and the formula will not be digested. Kidney function in newborns is 25 per cent of what it will be later. Because immature kidneys are unable to concentrate the urine kittens must excrete large amounts of dilute urine. When kittens stop nursing they dehydrate quickly therefore please consider this very valid point if your kitten loses weight, becomes chilled or otherwise fails to thrive. You can look in the kittens mouth for a lack of moisture, a very pink tongue or mucus membranes. You can pick the kittens skin up at the back of his neck. If it doesn't bounce right back this is a sign of dehydration. Watch the kittens urine. If it is not clear, but a distinct yellow this is a sign of dehydration. Anyone raising kittens by hand should

**have sub-q fluids and syringes on hand. Many kittens have been turned around just by the injection of sub-q fluids. Weigh your Newborn daily. His weight gain will give you a good idea of how he's thriving. I keep a log book with each kittens history in it, their weight, age, and dates of vaccinations.**

**The third thing to realize is these babies do NOT come with the knowledge of "going regularly". They would, under ideal circumstances, have their moms clean their bottoms and help them urinate and defecate. They do not, nor do you, have that luxury. I have heard many people say use a warm cotton pad and gently wipe their little bottoms till they go. I say hogwash. Moms tongue, if you've ever felt it, is like sand paper. I use a nubby textured wash cloth (to try to stimulate Mom's tongue) and hold them under warm running water wiping. Remember they MUST go. For constipated kittens put a smidgen of mineral oil in their formula. We are looking for clear urine and formed stool.**

**Do not be afraid to bathe these babies regularly. Use an antibacterial soap (avoiding their eyes) for the first couple of weeks until their eyes open then graduate to baby shampoo. Dry them well, followed by a hair dryer set on low. Keep one hand between the dryer and the baby to be diffuse the heat and avoid any "hot" spots on the Kitten. This will also insure the heat is kept at a low temperature. Put them immediately back into their nest when you are done. The main reason I use an antibacterial soap is because of their background. We have no idea of what living conditions they**

**were in before we got them so it's just generally better to be safe than sorry.**



**When the babies are about 4 weeks old it's time to introduce them to the litter box. Get a "low to the ground" one and be sure you use clay litter. Never use scoopable with new**

**babies, They tend to play in it and eat it. They will make you very proud the first time they go all by themselves. Simply place them in the box after eating and let them go for it. They are naturally inclined to use this and it is so nice to stop rubbing little bottoms. With any luck you are raising more than one. If so you'll find one is eager to use the box while the others poke at him causing considerable distraction. Try taking the others away if one is inclined to use the box for it's original purpose. Most newborns think the litter box is just a big sandbox and love to root around in it, kicking the sand up and out. You just know if they could laugh out loud they would.**

**Introducing them to food from the bowl is a different matter all together. A lot of these kids simply don't want the burden of feeding themselves. They just aren't ready to give up the nipple yet. I have most of my trouble getting them to eat out of a bowl. You start by introducing canned food mixed with formula when they are about 4 weeks old.. Put a little on your finger and hold it to the kittens mouth. You may have to shove it in just to show them how tasty it is. Once they are eating from your finger let them follow your finger back to the bowl. Repeat this often, in fact once they are ready for weaning do this every time you feed them. Don't be discouraged if they don't jump up and down with glee. After all they like you! You've been feeding them right along.**

**Upper respiratory is a very common illness in kittens. This is an airborne disease so the kitten should be kept isolated. First thing to do is get Vet care so they are on an antibiotic. A much needed medicine to have on hand is Terramycin.**

**This is an ointment which is applied to their eyes. I have yet to see a Feral Baby that didn't need it at some time. They come to us with so much wrong with them and usually the eyes is the first place you see it. I generally place my kittens in a "Kitty Sauna". I make this by tenting a carrier and placing the kittens inside. Just outside the door I place a humidifier filled with water and a little salt. I place the tent to include it and turn it on for about 5 to 15 minutes. The kittens are in warm moist air which is breaking up the mucus and allowing them to breathe freely. I take them from this and immediately put them right back into the warm nest. If you go over the time they should be in the sauna don't panic. I once forgot about a litter that I had "cooking" and remembered them after nearly an hour. When I took them out their little ears were dripping water but they were none the worse for wear. It's just not a good habit to get into. Set a timer.**

**One piece of equipment I have found very useful (although the kittens do not like it!) is a rectal thermometer and a jar of Vaseline. Taking a cats temperature is very simple. You just put the thermometer in the Vaseline and then insert it in their rectum. Place it about an inch in and hold it there for at least one minute - two if you can and read it. A kittens temperature ranges between 99 and 102 degrees. Anything higher than 102 and I get concerned. This is usually a good time to call your Vet.**

**One thing that very easy to do but you must avoid is overfeeding. Overfeeding produces Diarrhea. It is far better to err on the side of underfeeding rather than overfeeding.**

**Follow this chart and you should have no problems: \*\* 30 cc is equal to one ounce of formula.**

**At birth; weight should be approx. 4 ounces. Give 32 cc of milk replacer per day spread out over 6-8 feedings.**

**At age 1 weeks; weight should be approx. 7 ounces. Give 56 cc of milk replacer spread out over 4 feedings.**

**At age 3 weeks; weight should be 10 ounces. Give 80 cc of milk replacer spread out over 3 feedings.**

**At age 4 weeks; weight should be approx. 13 ounces. Give 104 cc of milk replacer spread out over 3 feedings.**

**At Age 5 weeks a Kitten should weigh 1 pound and at 10 weeks 2 pounds. He should be eating by himself.**

**Should you get a Preemie, a Kitten weighing far less than average, please be prepared to feed him every hour until he is at weight appropriate for his age.**

**Remember, nothing is written in stone. Your kitten may have a voracious appetite or a very small one. When fed adequately a kittens stomach will feel full, not tense or distended. I set my alarm and get up every two hours with age 0 through 1 week, every three hours age 1 week through 3 weeks. After three weeks I usually feed the their last bottle at 11:00 P.M. and then again at 5 or 6 A.M. After 4 weeks they need to be fed only 4 bottles a day - they will drink more and this is when I supplement their bottles with Rice Cereal. They are given Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner and Bedtime. Once they are eating out of a bowl I always leave**

**food with them over night. They may need the nourishment. There are many times when I would much rather be doing anything at all besides feeding kittens at 3 in the morning but the truth is I have been doing this for so long that I simply do not sleep through the night any more. Set an alarm so you can be sure your little charge gets fed. A steady weight gain of 10 grams or 1/3 ounce per day and a normal stool are indications you are feeding the correct amount. Overfeeding is indicated by a loose stool. Reduce the strength of the formula by diluting it 1/3 with water. Unchecked overfeeding leads to a depletion of digestive enzymes. Eventually, when there is no digestion of the formula you will see a stool which looks like curdled milk. At this point stop all formula and give only pediolyte and water until the kitten has a normal stool.**

**One hint I have found very useful when raising an "only" child. Place a small stuffed toy in his nest with him. He will snuggle up to it . One other trick you can try is empty out the contents of a stuffed bear or any animal and place in an alarm clock. Put the stuffing back in to muffle the sound. Sometimes this muted noise is reassuring to the baby.**

**Kittens die - for no other reason than it is their time and there is nothing we can do about it. This is one reason I watch my babies so carefully. Once they start to fade they can go very quickly. We usually are fighting the odds when we take these babies in. They can be born with many congenital defects which means it wasn't anything you were doing. Something went wrong during the pregnancy and it is not known until the kitten is 2 or 3 weeks of age. My last**

**litter this past summer (1996) were all born with problems. Two had cleft palates and had to be put down immediately. The third one lived for three weeks but his intestinal tract wasn't developed and he died. I have found the first litters in the spring are usually the healthiest. As the season wears on and the Mom has more litters she ends up having very little to give them in the way of nutrition and we see it in the general health of the babies we get. If you lose a baby try to remember you gave it, quite possibly and very probably, the only love it ever knew. Sometimes we are merely the stopping off place for Kittens on their way to their next life. If you have shown this baby a loving hand then you have certainly done a great deal and I do thank you!**

**Feeding and warmth are the most important things these babies need. If you must err in feeding let it be on the side of underfeeding. If you have fed the kitten and wiped his bottom and he is still crying he either has colic (from over feeding) or he is cold. The temperature inside his nest should be about 85~. It doesn't hurt to buy a thermometer and place it inside his nest to keep a close check on the heat. You can also pick him up and holding him flat on your hand very gently pat his back or with one finger pat his side and see if he has a gas bubble. These kids really just need common sense.**

**After their umbilical cord falls off watch the area carefully. It doesn't hurt to give it a few wipes with Hydrogen Peroxide. They can be easily infected.**

**I have several hints to share with you and as the season gets started and goes along I will post them here. There is one**

**thing I do with all my babies that makes them quite lovable. I treat them exactly like I'm the Mom Cat. I carry them in my teeth - lick their little heads and hold them a lot. I hope these hints have encouraged you to try raising Feral babies yourself.**

**Many times, in fact more often than not, the babies we get have the runs. This is caused by exposure to parasites etc. If you are raising a homeless kitten who develops this problem first take him/her to your Vet. They usually need to be put on Antibiotics or another medication. All too often their little bottoms are red and raw. OUCH! Try putting Desitin on them. If you are not happy with these results use Vaseline. This simply puts a protective coat over the babies skin and prevents any fecal matter from getting on it. This will relieve the pain quite a bit. If this occurs very gently stimulate them under tepid running water.**

**When raising more than one baby, as in a litter, you will find that at about 2 to 3 weeks of age they will start rooting around in their nest looking for something to nurse on. Invariably they find each other. Besides being a nasty habit which doesn't look very nice they can get sick from ingesting urine. After stimulating them spray their little bottoms with Bitter Apple. This is a foul tasting but harmless spray which can be purchased at any pet store. It's original use is designed for electrical cords however I have found it helps deter a lot of unhealthy and unwanted behavior. If this doesn't do the trick, separate them. Do not allow them to nurse on each other.**

**Remember every time you introduce something new to eat it will probably show in their bowels. Any change in formula - from powdered to liquid etc. If they should get constipated first try putting a few drops of cooking oil (vegetable) in their formula. If this doesn't work do "kitty push-ups". Holding them in one hand, rest their back feet on your other hand and gently push them up and down several times to exercise their stomach muscles. They hate it - I love it. I sing them little songs and laugh at them as they glare at me.**

**Here is one more thing I forgot all about. Baby nose drops. If you have a kitten with an upper respiratory illness they usually can not smell. If they can't smell, chances are they will not eat. About twice a day spray them with pediatric nose drops - right up their little nostrils. This will clear the nasal passages, they will be able to smell and thus eat. Do this just before you offer them their meal. Simple little hints that usually work.**

**If you have a baby that is showing signs of distress try putting a little dab of syrup in their mouth. Sometimes this is all they need to give them the added energy boost to get them eating.**

**You may find your sweet little kid has a voracious appetite at about the age of three weeks. I usually buy a box of Gerber's Rice Cereal and mix a little in with their formula. I honestly don't believe it does anything for them as far as nutrition goes but it does tend to stay with them a little longer than just formula. It may be just what you need to get a full nights sleep.**

**I am currently raising a very tiny little girl. She is three weeks old yet weighs only 5 1/2 ounces! She suckles rather well, urinates and defecates well but continues to be extremely small. Since I have had her since birth I have no idea of her health background. She is being injected with 12 - 15 cc. of sub-q fluids twice daily and I just got a wonderful hint from a dear friend. I am adding, besides Rice Cereal to her formula, Baby Strained Chicken. This has already added a 1/2 ounce to her tiny little body. Adding this protein brings to mind a problem that we were having last year with Gerber Strained meat. Be sure to read the label before you buy. Gerber has changed their formula however I am not sure who might still have the older version. Please be sure it has no Onion Powder. This can be harmful to the babies. There is ALWAYS something new to learn with these kids....**

**When you are gathering supplies for your new addition be sensible. These kids are most likely going to need a Vet visit so save your money where ever you can. I go to the thrift stores and yard sales and buy blankets. Then I bring them home, wash them and cut them into four even pieces. Thus, for the price of about \$1.00 you've got four nice blankets for the babies. I also buy old roaster pans to use as litter boxes for the kids. They really don't need Nieman Marcus or Macys. All they need is to be warm, fed and loved!**

**I am including a formula recipe that can be made from things bought at your local 7-11 store, just in case you find a baby when the pet stores aren't open:**

**One 12 ounce can of Evaporated Skim cows milk, One 4 ounce can evaporated whole cows milk, one 4 ounce**

**container of plain yogurt and three egg yolks. Mix well and strain. I always give it to them warm - let them think it's coming right from Mom...what do they know???? They're happy, I'm happy and it's usually a nice ending.**

**And I have found a recipe for a pedialite substitute:**

**4 1/4 C. Water. 2 tsp. sugar - you can add up to eight for flavor. 1/2 tsp. salt and 1/2 tsp baking soda. This is good to have on hand for babies that are getting dehydrated or showing signs of URI.**

**Kittens that are taken from Mom, for whatever reason, at the age of about 1 or 2 weeks may have a little bit of trouble adjusting to the bottle. This is simply a matter of persistence. You must keep offering the bottle and they will learn that this is where food comes from - not mom. I imagine it must be a bit of a shock. I hold them close to me so they get warmth while nursing, a poor substitute but usually I'm all they have. Don't give up on them. Keep offering the bottle. They may go as much as 24 hours with very little nutritional input. Place the nipple in their mouth and squeeze the bottle. They really will eat. Any baby that has not been eating for more than - oh about 6 hours is probably getting very low on blood sugar. Mix Karo syrup with warm water and give it to him. It's surprising how much this will help.**

**Watch closely any new babies stool. Quite often they have the runs and this is usually very treatable with Amoxy Drops. (where would we be without them??) See your Vet for a proper diagnosis. If the stool is quite dark in color -**

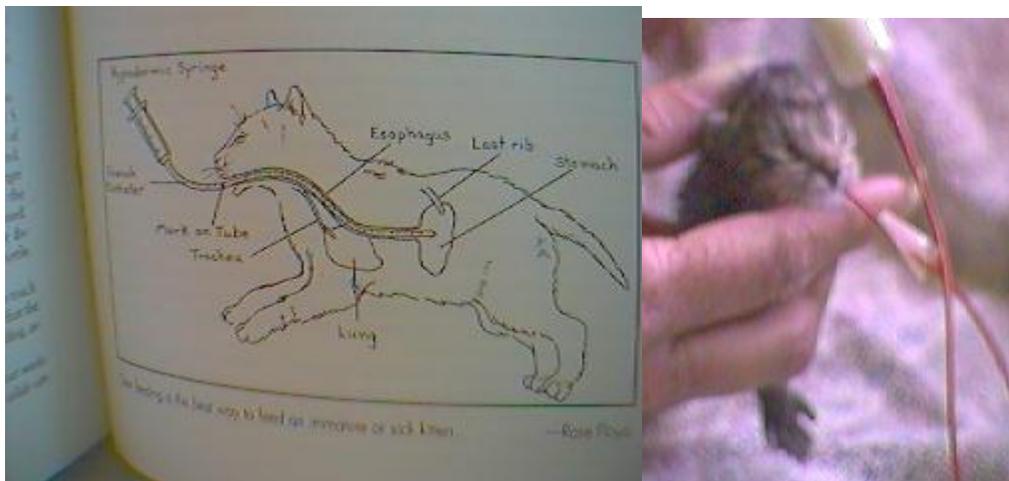
**almost a black - this indicates blood in the stool and immediate Vet care.**

**I normally do not advocate early FELV testing simply because you can get false positives. This is a test that comes back positive for FELV when the kitten is perfectly healthy. No matter what the results of early testing they must be re-tested at age 4 - 6 months. About the only time I would even suggest early testing is if your healthy kitten starts acting lethargic. This is not normal for a healthy kitten to suddenly start laying around. Watch closely his appetite and bathroom habits. A complete blood work-up is certainly not out of order here. All of Safe Haven kittens are tested prior to adoption as a courtesy to our clients.**

**If you get a Feral Kitten that has been with his Mom for a while the chances of him having fleas are fairly good - in fact almost a sure bet. These babies can **NOT** have Flea Shampoo. They are way to young. You must bathe them regularly and use a flea comb. Fleas can be deadly to a newborn so be diligent. I have seen 4 ounces of baby covered in fleas. It's pretty disgusting but a fact of life we must deal with.**

**There are times, when we get these babies, they are so young they have not been with their Mom at all. Sometimes they do not suckle due to being weak or ill. This is when we must resort to tube feeding. This is not difficult but it can be deadly to the kitten if not done properly. I am including a graphic to make it easier for you to understand what it involves. You take a catheter (size 5 French for smaller kittens, 8 or 10 for larger ones) and a syringe. You weigh the**

**baby and calculate how much formula he gets in a 24 hour period. Divide this up into 6 feedings. Measure the tube from the babies mouth to his last rib. Place a piece of tape over the end near his mouth so you know how far to insert the tube. Warm the formula and draw up the prescribed amount through the tube. Be sure there is no air in the tube. Now place the end of the tube into a bit of formula and allow the kitten to taste it - then slip it down his throat. It should go all the way to where you've marked the tube. Wait a minute to hear him cry just to insure you haven't gotten it into his lungs. Slowly inject the formula directly into his stomach. This may be the only way a baby gets nourishment. Please be sure to measure carefully and after the tube is inserted wait to hear the baby cry . Liquid directly into a babies lungs is not only an easy mistake; it's a deadly one.**



**Another all too common problem you will run into while raising a new born is dehydration. I have never had a newborn season without encountering it at least once. As I have said before this is overcome by the injection of Sub-q fluids. These can be obtained from your Vet along with the needles and a plastic syringe. You will probably need a 20 cc**

**syringe. The size of the needle depends on the size of the baby. The smaller needle goes into their skin easier but takes longer for the fluid to enter - the larger needle leaves a bigger hole but the fluid goes in rather rapidly. You pick the skin up between their shoulder blades, making sure you have enough of it between your fingers to insure you are just going into the folds of the skin. The amount of sub-q fluids relates directly to the babies weight. Check with your Vet about this. I usually warm the fluid in the Mico Wave - just slightly. You don't want to introduce cold liquid into the babies body and you don't want to scald them. Insert the needle into the fold of skin you are holding up and plunge the fluid in. When you are done, remove the needle and hold the area closed with your finger tips for about a minute. If you don't some of the fluid will leak back out. Please don't be afraid to try this - it just may save your babies life. The picture I have is Darlene - she suddenly stopped eating - and after several hours I decided she needed something in her. Thank you for trying!**



**If your Vet has decided on a course of Antibiotics for your baby please be sure to give them all - for the full course of a**

**week or two. The kitten may respond rapidly but, not unlike humans, the germs may be lingering in their little bodies. A relapse with these little tykes can be deadly. I usually just pick the baby up, open their mouths and essentially pour the medicine in. I have had some who refuse to take it. These kids I hold by the scruff of their neck, tilt their head back and then dose them. Sometimes you must be very quick but they really must have all their medication. If the Doctor has given them an antibiotic with the directions "Twice a day" be sure to space it out to get the full value of the medicine. If they get their medicine at 10:00 A.M. and again at 5:00 P.M. you're defeating the purpose of the medicine. Try to get 12 hours between the doses.**

**Now here is something I have become accustomed to and just didn't give it any thought. Recently a lady wrote and asked me about her cat sucking on himself. My Vets and I feel this is a comfort - much like a baby sucking his thumb. Perhaps he was taken off the bottle a little earlier than he would have liked. One that I raised last year always curls up and sucks on a patch of fur near her back leg as she drifts off to sleep. Since she is a black girl this has created a slightly orange colored patch of fur but other than that no harm is done. My little white boy, Joshua, always puts his front foot in his mouth when he is going to sleep and sucks vigorously on it. I imagine this habit can be broken but why would you bother? They are content and that is our mission here - content kittens.**

**What about discipline? It is necessary but you NEVER EVER slap a kitten. You teach them the same way their**

**mom would. Yes, you may feel a bit ridiculous at first but it works and makes a nicer kitten. You get down on the floor and bring your head down to their level. Growl at them, "cuff" them lightly and let them know some actions are just not acceptable. I refuse to teach them to hunt - I draw the line there but I willingly show the appropriate behavior.**

**Indoor or Outdoor? My own experience and feelings are simply this. These babies have started out, usually, in less than desirable conditions. Studies have shown that an indoor cat has a life expectancy four times that of an outdoor cat. Do this sweet little bundle of fur a favor and let him know he was rescued for a reason - to live long and well. Keep him indoors.**



**About those nipples: I have bought them and laughed to myself when I read their instructions; poke a hole in the end with a needle. Sure, if you want to watch your baby turn their head inside out trying to get milk out of the bottle. I use a pair of scissors and cut a small slit diagonally. You don't want the milk to run out - just make it easier for this baby to suck on.**

**Many times these babies simply do not have all the nutrients needed to make them healthy. I add "Baby Dophilus" which can be purchased at any health food store to their formula and, once weaned, to their food. This creates friendly bacteria which they often need just for bowel problems. I add 1/4 tsp. to their formula and about 1 tsp. sprinkled over their canned food.**

**I have, on more than one occasion, gone into the kitten room and found a baby lying prone on the bottom of the cage. This does not always mean certain death. These kids can not regulate their blood sugar and if they miss a meal they may go into shock from it. Pick them up and immediately give them a drop of syrup on their tongue - then feed them and watch them carefully. I would certainly see a Vet but do try to stabilize them at once.**

**When weaning your Kitten be sure NOT to use any Kitten food that has fish additives in it. This addition is almost always comprised of ground up fish heads and such and almost always results in Diarrhea for the kitten. Kitten food that uses only chicken and/or Turkey is your best bet. I have found that Nutro Kitten dry food is a bit too fatty and will result in the same thing. Science Diet Kitten food seems to work best.**

**It is **VERY** important to isolate any new kitten you bring in until you're positive they have no transmittable germs. URI is an airborne disease that can be carried through the heating vents. Ringworm is a germ that gets on absolutely everything and is very difficult to get rid of. Pan Leuk (Parvo ) is transmitted through body fluids only. FELV is transmitted through saliva, feeding dishes etc. You must be the judge on what you're willing to submit your own cats to. I keep all my kittens in a "kitten room". They have absolutely no contact with my own cats.**

**After close to 20 years of raising these babies, I have heard of and tried using **Goats Milk** as a substitute for formula. I can only guess it matches Moms formula fairly closely. I**

**have been using it exclusively on a litter I am raising and they are doing really wonderfully. It wouldn't hurt to try this to put needed ounces on a tiny baby.**

**When you get a kitten that has been with Mom and does not want to nurse you must be persistent. Put their little heads in a headlock and hold the bottle in their mouth. It may take them some time but they will nurse.**



**If you are raising a baby, or plan to, I thank you!!!!**

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