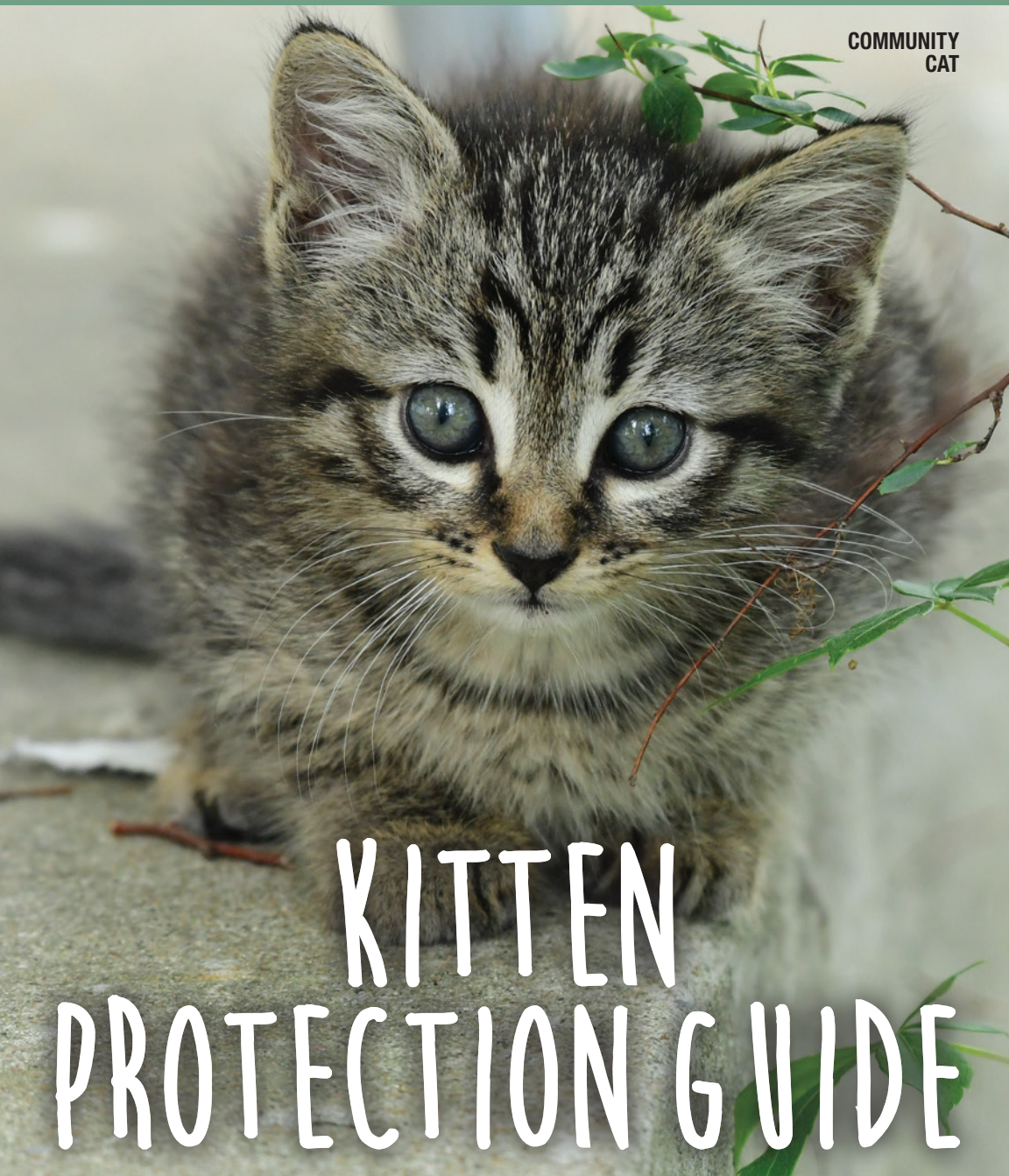


COMMUNITY
CAT



KITTEN PROTECTION GUIDE

**How to protect young kittens
in every community**

About Alley Cat Allies®

Alley Cat Allies believes every cat deserves to live out his or her life to the fullest.

Founded in 1990, Alley Cat Allies is the leading advocacy organization for cats with a mission to transform and develop communities to protect and improve the lives of all cats and kittens. Together with our over 1.7 million supporters, we work toward a world where cats are valued and every community has humane and effective programs and policies to defend them.

Through our fearless advocacy, humane care, education and outreach, and law and policy activism, we equip and mobilize citizens, advocates, grassroots groups, shelters, veterinary professionals, and elected officials across the United States and around the world to improve their communities for cats through nonlethal, evidence-based approaches.



Visit our website at alleycat.org.

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This is your guide to saving kittens' lives.

Kittens are born outdoors throughout the year, but especially in the warm months of spring and summer, known as kitten season. When well-meaning people come across these kittens, they may be tempted to scoop them up and bring them indoors...or to animal shelters.

But the truth is, not all kittens need to be “rescued.”

IMPORTANT

Do not take neonatal kittens or their mother to an animal shelter.

Most animal shelters do not have the programs and resources to provide the round-the-clock care fragile neonatal kittens need. *That is why neonatal kittens are at high risk of being killed in shelters.*

Since 1990, advocates, budding kitten caregivers, shelters, and organizations worldwide have looked to Alley Cat Allies for expertise in protecting kittens and implementing humane programs and policies to protect them. This guide reflects the standards and knowledge we've developed and shared in our decades of action.

Find our most critical kitten resources at
alleycat.org/FoundAKitten.



Alley Cat Allies Community Resource Tool™

Our Community Resource Tool will connect you with local resources, including low-cost veterinary options, resources for financial support, food banks, and other assistance. You can find the help you need to help kittens! Just go to GetHelp.alleycat.org.



SCRAPS
Bethesda, Maryland



What is a neonatal kitten?

A neonatal kitten is a kitten at her tiniest, when she is newborn to 4 weeks old. Neonatal kittens are in the most vulnerable stage of life. They rely on their mothers for everything from eating to using the bathroom.

When a mother cat is not around or able to care for neonatal kittens, they will require extra-special, round-the-clock care from people. This care includes bottle feeding by hand and much more.

For these reasons, neonatal kittens are at the highest risk in animal shelters, which very rarely have staff dedicated to caring for kittens at this age. For this reason, neonatal kittens should NOT be brought to shelters.

Disclaimer

The information in this guide is not veterinary or medical advice and does not replace consultation with a licensed veterinarian for any cat or kitten health concerns.

**A neonatal kitten
being bottle fed**



Kitten Healthcare: A Brief Guide

Please Know

Neonatal kittens are in a very vulnerable stage of their lives, especially if they are not with their mother cat. Despite your compassion and dedicated efforts, they may not survive. Do your best to provide care and seek veterinary attention for any emergency situations. Remember to be proud, whatever may happen: the work you do to protect young kittens is incredible and important!

Learn how to care for kittens through their most critical stages of growth on page 27.

Signs to take kittens to the veterinarian IMMEDIATELY

- Thin stomachs and gaunt faces, visible ribs and spine
- Cold ears, bellies, and paws
- Pale gums and tongue
- Lethargy/almost no movement
- Excessively crusted eyes or nose
- Diarrhea or vomiting
- Struggling to breathe
- Limping
- Visible wounds or sores
- Crying out in pain
- Visible flies, maggots, eggs, or fleas

Keep dangerous items out of kittens' reach

Kittens are very curious and can easily get into food, plants, and chemicals that are dangerous for them. Keep an eye on them and keep their spaces clear of those items. We have a list of toxic and dangerous substances for cats and kittens at alleycat.org/Poison.



IMPORTANT: Do not put collars on kittens

Kittens grow quickly and play hard, so collars without a breakaway option can be dangerous and lead to strangulation. Additionally, DO NOT put a collar with a bell on it on any kitten or cat. The constant sound of the bell can upset and scare them. Additionally, the bell adds an extra element that can become tangled or stuck.

Common health issues in neonatal kittens (under 4 weeks old)

Remember: Vomiting or diarrhea are never normal! In a small kitten, these signs can escalate quickly into emergencies. It is best to consult with a veterinarian as soon as possible if your kittens show these symptoms.

Dehydration

Dehydration is one of the biggest threats to kittens, along with chilling. Signs of dehydration include limpness, unresponsiveness, sunken eyes, and lethargy. You can also check by pulling up the skin at the scruff of the neck when the kitten is in a standing position. If the skin does not return to resting position quickly, the kitten is dehydrated.

Upper Respiratory Infection (URI)

Though this is common in kittens, it shouldn't be ignored. If heavy yellow discharge develops or the kitten has trouble breathing or eating, see a veterinarian immediately. A mild URI can be cleared up by wiping away discharge with a warm, wet cloth and keeping kittens in a warm, humid environment. You can put a humidifier in the room the kittens are in, or hold them in a steamy bathroom for 10-15 minutes.

Fleas

Fleas on a very small kitten can cause anemia. Pick fleas off with a flea comb. For a severe infestation, you can bathe the kitten in warm water. You can also use a very small amount of gentle, liquid dish soaps like Dawn to bathe kittens. Avoid the eye area—use a washcloth around the



face—and rinse them thoroughly. **Do Not** use flea shampoo or topical flea treatments on kittens 6 weeks or younger. Doing so can cause damage. **IMPORTANT:** Dry kittens thoroughly after getting them wet to ensure they do not chill. Learn more about keeping kittens warm and dry on page 19.

Parasites/Diarrhea

Any drastic change in stool consistency can mean trouble, and must be addressed immediately. Call the veterinarian RIGHT AWAY. Diarrhea and dehydration are often caused by parasites. Kittens can begin a deworming treatment schedule at a young age, but only move forward with a plan in consultation with a veterinarian.

A guide to healthcare for older kittens (4 weeks and older)

Older kittens are more independent than neonatal kittens, and therefore require a different approach from caregivers. This is also when kittens should start receiving regular preventive care from a veterinarian.

Routine veterinary care for kittens 4 weeks and older

Kittens older than 4 weeks are ready for their first routine veterinary visits! At 6 weeks and up, kittens can begin receiving vaccines. Your veterinarian will likely recommend a series of FVRCP (feline viral rhinotracheitis, feline calicivirus, and feline panleukopenia) combination vaccinations. Kittens can receive a rabies vaccine once they are 3-4 months old.

The veterinarian can test for parasites and go over recommended parasite control, such as dewormer and flea and tick prevention. Do not provide treatment without consulting the veterinarian, as safe methods of parasite control vary depending on kittens' age and weight.

Kittens can be spayed or neutered once they weigh at least two pounds, at around 2 months old. However, kittens will benefit from being able to stay with their mothers longer—until they are about 3 months old. Keep in mind that kittens as young as 4 months old can become pregnant, which is why it is crucial to spay or neuter them young!

Feeding kittens over 3 weeks old

As kittens start the weaning process around 3 to 4 weeks old and transition to wet and dry cat food (learn more on page 34), they need a kitten-specific diet to help their growing bodies! There are numerous options available—just make sure it is formulated for kittens! Once kittens are around 10 months old, they can transition to adult cat food. This should be done gradually over about a week. Weaned kittens should have access to fresh water at all times.



Ensure kittens cannot access dangerous items

Growing kittens need to learn how to play, and toys are critical for their enrichment! To protect them, give them age-appropriate toys. Avoid things like loose strings, shoelaces, and anything small enough that the kitten may swallow it. A kitten ingesting these items by mistake can be a medical emergency.

Watch out for potential dangers like hanging strings from window blinds or unhidden/uncovered electric cables. Keep these items carefully pinned up or cover, hide, and secure them so kittens aren't tempted to play with or chew them.

TABATHA AND HONEY
New Jersey



Alley Cat Allies

Leave Them Be™

Let Mom and Kittens Thrive Outside

Removing kittens from their mothers and bringing them indoors can be harmful to their well-being. If you see kittens alone, their mother is likely close by. Her instincts make her the kittens' best possible caregiver.

The best thing you can do is **LEAVE THEM BE.**

Compassionate action is guided by what is in a cat or kitten's best interest. That means allowing kittens and their mother cats who are already thriving outdoors to stay right where they are.

Leave Them Be until the kittens are no longer nursing (meaning they are weaned), which will occur at about 8 to 10 weeks of age. However, kittens can stay with the mother for a few weeks longer. Then, consult with your veterinarian on potentially spaying or neutering the kittens—and also spaying mom!



What if a kitten is sick or injured?

If you believe a kitten is sick or injured, contact your local veterinarian and rush her to the clinic carefully, in a padded carrier.

Find details on keeping kittens warm (which is essential) on page 19. See our guide on signs of illness or injury on page 5.



Can I return kittens to mom after treatment?

If the veterinarian determines the kitten is sufficiently recovered, she may be able to return to mom if she has only been briefly separated.

However, take care to check regularly to ensure mom is caring

for the kitten and that the kitten is thriving. In many cases, though, the separated kitten will have to be kept by a caregiver and bottle-fed from that point on rather than be returned to her mother outdoors.

Busting myths

Despite the rumors, it is unlikely a mother cat will reject her kittens because humans touch them!

What if kittens and mom are in danger?

In extreme cases, you may determine that it is safer for both mom and kittens to move. If possible, move the kittens to another outdoor spot as close to their original nest as is safe so their mother can move with and find them.

In other rare cases, you may determine that mom and kittens need to come indoors.

- Bring the whole family inside to a quiet, small room (like a bathroom). You can also use a large dog crate, covered with a blanket.
- Provide...
 - A padded carrier as a hiding place
 - Food and water
 - A litter box (placed as far away from the sleeping and eating area as possible)
 - Find details on creating an indoor space for community cats at alleycat.org/SickorInjured
- Minimize visits in order to check on kittens but not stress out mom.



Short-term time indoors

If mom and kittens were only brought indoors briefly, aim to return them to their outdoor home as soon as possible.

Long-term time indoors

If the kittens have been indoors for a significant amount of time, as in weeks, we don't recommend returning them. Instead, keep mom and kittens together until the kittens are at least 8 weeks old and weaned. Mom can be spayed, vaccinated, eartipped and returned outdoors. The kittens can be socialized for adoption. Find more information on page 12.



What to do if you find a kittens outdoors

If you spot kittens outdoors, especially at their tiniest, you may feel compelled to jump in and help. Compassion is a great impulse, but there are several



factors to consider to make the best decisions for the kittens’ care. Find full, detailed information at alleycat.org/FoundAKitten.

Age Matters

How you determine the best way to help kittens depends highly on their age. Learn more about estimating kitten ages starting on page 27.

Young kittens are at very high risk of being killed in shelters without humane programs. And even under the best shelter circumstances, a mother cat can become so stressed that her health and ability to care for her kittens are affected.

The shelter environment can also be dangerous for kittens because their immune systems haven’t fully developed. So, they can easily catch diseases. Shelters are no place for neonatal kittens.



If kittens are 8 weeks or older

Kittens of this age are generally weaned from their mother, meaning they don't rely on her milk and are eating on their own. Kittens who are 2 months old, and at least 2 pounds, can be spayed or neutered. Keep in mind, though, that it may be better to allow kittens to stay with their mother until they are around 3 months old before setting that appointment.

If you have a scale handy and the kitten allows you to handle them, you can give them a quick weigh in!

If the kittens' mother is with them, spay her at the same time. We have tips for trapping a mother cat and kittens at alleycat.org/TNRKittens.



After spay or neuter, you have a choice

Do TNR—return mom and kittens outdoors. Kittens older than 8 weeks who have been raised outdoors by their mother cat, and were not kept indoors for any extended period of time before or after spay and neuter, can be returned outdoors. They are community cats and they will thrive.

OR

Foster and adopt the kittens. If you have the time and means, you can foster the kittens for adoption or adopt them yourself. We have a guide to find the perfect adoptive home at alleycat.org/AdoptionTips.



An important note

Alley Cat Allies does not, in general, recommend trying to socialize a cat or kitten outdoors who is over 4 months of age and not already socialized. However, there is a gray area, especially between the ages of 4 and 8 months, where the success of socialization depends on the individual cat.

But keep in mind that socializing requires a lot of time, effort, care, and devotion, especially for older kittens. Plus, results are not guaranteed. If you do TNR, kittens will be safe and healthy in their outdoor homes with their feline families.

However, if you, for any reason, brought kittens younger than 8 weeks old indoors and raised them there, opt to spay or neuter and adopt rather than TNR.

Learn more about socializing kittens at
alleycat.org/KittenSocialization



If kittens are younger than 8 weeks old

Consider these next questions, and the steps to take, carefully.

SCENARIO 1

Kittens are with their mother cat

Leave Them Be! Kittens who are healthy and thriving with their mother outdoors do not need to be “rescued.” Learn more on page 9.

Remember: Mother knows best. Plus, neonatal kittens (kittens under 4 weeks old) need round-the-clock care to survive, which is challenging for humans to provide. These kittens are unweaned, meaning they still rely on their mother’s milk. They also have other constant needs that must be tended to by hand, if mom is not present.

Why can’t I bring kittens AND mom indoors?

A community cat may become so stressed by being confined in the new environment that it impacts her health and her ability to care for her kittens. Community cats thrive in their outdoor home and the mother cat has likely chosen an ideal space to raise her kittens. If mom and kittens look healthy, there is no need to intervene.

If you believe they are in danger, see our information on page 10.

How CAN I help mom and kittens outdoors?

You can’t do a mother cat’s job quite like her, but you can make her more comfortable as she cares for her kittens outdoors. Provide her with essentials like:

- **Regular food and water.** A nursing mother cat can always use some extra wet food so she can keep providing necessary nutrients to her kittens. Find details to care for community cats, including mother cats, at alleycat.org/BestPractices.
- **An outdoor shelter.** Mother cats like to raise their kittens in nests, where they feel hidden and protected. An outdoor shelter is a perfect safe space. You can purchase one or build one yourself. We have options at alleycat.org/ShelterGallery.
- **Peace and quiet.** Keep an eye on mother and kittens, but don’t approach or let dogs or other cats come near as much as possible. Doing so will cause a mother cat stress.



Once kittens are grown up, spay or neuter

Wait until the kittens are over 8 weeks old. This is the age when they are usually weaned from their mother and can be separated from her. Then, you have a new decision to make...

Let kittens continue to live outdoors as community cats. The kittens were already fine and at home outdoors, so they can thrive there with their mother. Before they reach 4 months old, have them spayed or neutered through a TNR program.

OR

Foster and adopt out the kittens. If you have the resources (and it will take many), you can separate kittens who are AT LEAST 2 months old from their mother and bring them indoors to socialize them for adoption.

Either way, spay mom. The mother cat should be spayed, vaccinated, and eartipped as part of a TNR program and returned to her outdoor home regardless of what decision you make for the kittens.

- **What if mom is friendly?** Socialized community cats can still be returned to their outdoor homes as part of TNR. If she is thriving there, she will continue to thrive there. Additionally, a community cat can appear friendly to people yet would actually be uncomfortable if brought indoors. Learn more at [alleycat.org/SocializationSpectrum](https://www.alleycat.org/SocializationSpectrum).



SCENARIO 2

Kittens are alone **WITHOUT** their mother cat

First and foremost

Do not assume that a kittens are abandoned or orphaned just because you do not see their mother. A mother cat will temporarily leave her kittens for good reasons, like looking for food. She may even be hiding and waiting for YOU to leave.

Wait and Watch

Always wait several hours, or even a full day, to see if mom returns.

- Watch from a hidden spot or from inside so you don't scare the mother cat away. Your presence may keep her from returning to her kittens' nest.
- Even if you don't see the mother cat for a long time, check on the kittens periodically. If they are cuddled together and sleeping quietly, look pink, warm, and clean, and have full bellies, then their mother has very likely been back. If the kittens do not look healthy, take immediate action and bring them to a veterinarian. Learn more on page 5.
- **A Helpful Tip:** Set up a trail camera. Or, as a cheaper option, sprinkle oat or flaxseed flour near the kittens' nest. **DO NOT** use uncooked wheat flour, as it can contain dangerous bacteria.

Mom isn't coming back, and I'm sure of it

If you have waited for several hours and have reason to believe the kittens' mother is no longer around, step in to help them. Neonatal kittens will need special supplies and round-the-clock care to survive.



I need help caring for neonatal kittens!

Raising neonatal kittens can be challenging, but anyone can learn how to become a kitten caregiver. You can do it! See our information on hand-raising neonatal kittens starting on page 17.

But if you need support, consider the following resources:

- **Research if your local animal shelter has a Wait Until 8® program.**

In a Wait Until 8 program, shelters empower good Samaritans who find neonatal kittens to care for those kittens at home. The shelter provides tools and instructions, like kitten care kits, to ensure a kitten's caregiver has everything they need.

- **Find a local organization, veterinarian, or advocate to help.**

They may be able to help directly, have someone in their network willing to take on the kitten's care or advise you, or even know of a nursing mother cat who may "adopt" the kittens. Search for resources near you on our Community Resource Tool at [GetHelp.alleycat.org](https://gethelp.alleycat.org).



- **Recruit friends, family, or neighbors.** If you work a day job and simply can't provide constant care for neonatal kittens, reach out to the people in your circle. We recommend only seeking help from people who already have experience caring for neonatal kittens.

Once kittens are old enough: Spay or neuter and adopt

Some experienced veterinarians can spay or neuter kittens when they are 2 months old and at least 2 pounds. In other cases, waiting until they are 3 months old may be ideal. In any case, spay or neuter the kittens before they are 4 months old, as kittens are capable of becoming pregnant around this age.

If you have raised kittens indoors, DO NOT return them outdoors. They will not have the skills to live in an outdoor environment. Find them adoptive indoor homes. Or, make the decision that you will adopt them!

MOCHA



 Alley Cat Allies

A Guide to Neonatal Kitten Care



Thank you for taking the incredible step of becoming a caregiver for neonatal kittens! Without their mother, these fragile babies rely on you for all of their needs. From feeding to keeping them warm to helping them eliminate, we'll walk you through best practices.



Find full information at alleycat.org/KittenCare

IMPORTANT: Have your veterinarian on speed dial while raising young kittens. Their advice is crucial, especially if something goes wrong.

Keep neonatal kittens with you at all times!

Alley Cat Allies Kitten Care Kit

Our Kitten Care Kit guide is here to help you gather all the items you need to raise young kittens and save their lives! All, or most, of these items can



An example of an Alley Cat Allies Kitten Care Kit

be purchased online or at your local pet store.
Learn more at alleycat.org/KittenCareKit.



You'll need

■ **Kitten milk replacer**

This is specially formulated based on a kitten's nutritional needs. It's available in liquid and powder form. Powder has a longer shelf life. Some popular brands are PetAg, GNC, and 21st Century. Remember: *Dairy milk is dangerous to kittens and must NOT be used. ONLY* feed young kittens with kitten milk replacer.

■ **Kitten nursing bottle**

Bottles come in different capacities. To prevent formula from going bad, make only as much as you need in one sitting. Tip: Try to get elongated nipples for your bottles if available—they are easier to use!

■ **One 3-cc syringe for feeding (without needle)**

Syringes help kittens who are too ill to suck on a bottle, and when feeding a blend of formula and wet food.

■ **Consider The Miracle Nipple.**

This nipple is a well-known trick of the trade for neonatal kitten caregivers! You can purchase them from pet stores or online.

■ **Canned kitten food**

Canned kitten food can be mixed with formula to help wean kittens onto more solid food. Choose a kitten-specific formula in your favorite brand.

■ **Puppy pad**

Being a kitten can be messy! Puppy pads are disposable and help absorb messes.

■ **Foil pan litter box**

A small, shallow pan helps kittens access the litter.

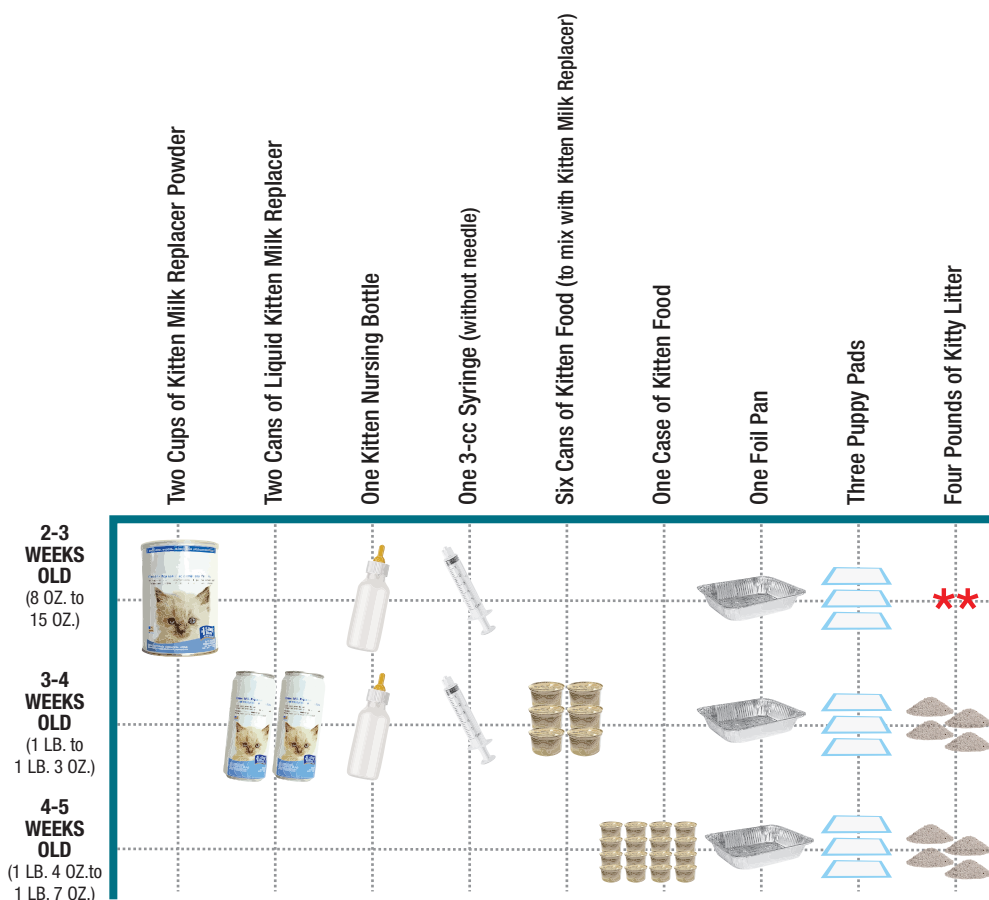
■ **Kitty litter**

For kittens, non-clumping litter is best.

CHIME



When to introduce each Kitten Care Kit item



Heat and bedding for neonatal kittens

IMPORTANT: Kittens can't regulate their body temperature until they are at least 3 weeks old. They become chilled easily, which is life-threatening. From the moment you find them, keep the kittens warm and watch out for signs of chilling (i.e., listlessness and cool to the touch).

Kittens' environment should have an area where temperatures reach...

- About 90 degrees Fahrenheit for newborns
- 85-88 degrees Fahrenheit for 1 to 2 week old kittens
- 80-85 degrees Fahrenheit for 2 to 3 week old kittens

The temperature of their surroundings can be gradually lowered as they move from newborn to 3 weeks old (when they can begin to regulate their own body temperature). A neonatal kitten's body temperature should generally be anywhere between 99 and 102 degrees Fahrenheit.

- Build a soft nest with a heating pad or other heating element that is completely covered with a folded blanket or towel. Be sure kittens have a cooler zone where they can move away from the heat if they want!
DO NOT allow kittens to touch hot surfaces directly, ever.
- Everything from a carrier to a cardboard box will do to hold kittens, as long as you can bring it with you wherever you go.
- Change the kittens' bedding as soon as it is soiled.
- If you just found a kitten and have nothing else on hand, use your own body heat to warm up a cold kitten. Rub her gently to aid circulation.
- Critical: Hold off on bottle feeding until the kittens feel warm to the touch.

How to clean neonatal kittens



Do NOT ever submerge a kitten in water to clean them. Neonatal kittens chill easily when wet, which is very dangerous for them.

If a kitten is dirty, use a warm, damp washcloth to wash the soiled areas only. Be sure to thoroughly dry the kitten and return her to her temperature-controlled carrier or box.

To dry kittens, follow these steps:

- Remove excess water with a paper towel
- Wrap the kitten in an absorbent, dry, warmed towel and rub gently but thoroughly.
- If the towel becomes too wet, swap it out for another.
- If the kitten still feels damp, finish the drying with a handheld hair dryer. **IMPORTANT:** Neonatal kittens' skin can burn easily, so only use the hair dryer on a LOW setting. Hold it at a distance, move the air stream constantly so it doesn't overheat one area, and use your fingers to ruffle the kittens' fur so it dries to the root. This will ensure you can feel if the air ever becomes too hot.

What to feed neonatal kittens

Stick to kitten formula, such as kitten milk replacer (KMR), which can be purchased at most pet supply stores. **Do not feed kittens with cow or goat milk or any plant-based/nut milk!**

If you find yourself with a kitten and pet stores are closed, this emergency kitten formula can be made at home. Only use it in emergencies. Mix all ingredients well and strain. Keep refrigerated and warm before serving.

- One 8 ounce can of evaporated milk
- 1 egg yolk
- 2 tablespoons of Karo syrup

Mix together thoroughly and strain before using.

How to feed neonatal kittens

Important: Do NOT feed a kitten who is cold. Make sure kittens feel warm to the touch, or feeding them can cause them harm. If you cannot regulate the kitten's body temperature, head to a veterinarian immediately.

STEP ONE

Prepare the formula

- Wash your hands.
- Wash the bottles and nipples you are using to feed thoroughly with soap and water before and after a feeding session. Use a bottle brush to reach all the way into the bottle. Be sure to carefully rinse out all soap residue. Air dry them.
- Check the kitten bottles' packaging to see if they are safe to boil in water. Boiling will disinfect the best. We recommend purchasing as much boil-safe kitten feeding equipment as possible.
- Place the formula in the kitten bottle

- Warm the formula by placing the filled bottle in hot water for a few minutes. DO NOT microwave the formula! Test a drop or two on your wrist to ensure it is warm and not hot: about 100 degrees Fahrenheit.
- If you are not using a nipple like the Miracle Nipple that has a hole already, you will have to poke the hole yourself. Heat up a needle or pin in boiling water and use it to poke a hole in the tip of the nipple.
- Test the formula flow by turning the bottle upside down. It should drip out slowly and NOT flow. If the formula flows, the hole is too big and you will need to start again with a new nipple. Too big of a hole means the kitten will take in too much milk when suckling.

STEP TWO



Hold or place the kitten on their stomach in a horizontal position

- **DO NOT turn kittens on their backs to feed them.** Feeding kittens on their backs increases the chances they will aspirate on (dangerously inhale) the formula.
- Hold or place kittens on their stomachs, similar to how they would nurse on their mother cat.
- You can place kittens on a table with a towel beneath them, firmly support them in your lap, or wrap the kitten in a blanket—as long as she is in the right position.

STEP THREE

Start feeding

- Press the tip of the nipple to the kitten's mouth. If she doesn't latch on and start suckling, very carefully squeeze a small drop (and NO more than a drop) onto the kitten's mouth. When kitten licks it off, gently feel her throat with a fingertip to ensure she can swallow. **IMPORTANT:** If a kitten appears unable to swallow, contact a veterinarian immediately.
- Hold kitten's head gently but firmly to support it and place the nipple carefully into her mouth. Tilt the bottle at about a 45-degree angle to start the flow of milk and prevent air from entering a kitten's stomach.
- The drop of formula should let kitten know it's meal time and encourage her to latch. If she doesn't latch or is latching weakly, try:
 - Pulling on the nipple the moment she closes her mouth to encourage her to suck harder and latch on.
 - Moving the nipple back and forth in the kitten's mouth.
 - Stroking her face and forehead gently to mimic a mother cat's tongue.
- **Important: Do NOT** squeeze formula down the kitten's throat, or she could aspirate (inhale formula), which can cause pneumonia! Let kitten set the pace and suckle on her own.

A neonatal kitten being bottle fed



STEP FOUR

AGATHA



 Alley Cat Allies

Wrap up

- Allow the kitten to eat until she stops suckling. Her stomach may feel round and full when touched, but should not feel hard.
- Be sure to clean any formula off of the kitten's face with a damp washcloth or towel. Dry her off as needed.

If kitten will not eat: Wait a few minutes and then try again. If you are unsuccessful with multiple attempts—especially with a kitten under 2 weeks old—contact a veterinarian immediately. They may have to assist with other feeding methods, like tube feeding.

Feeding Frequency

- 10 days or younger: Every 2 hours around the clock
- 11 days to 2½ weeks: Every 3 to 4 hours
- 2½ to 4 weeks: Every 5 to 6 hours
- 4 weeks and older: 2 to 3 times a day. Weaning occurs around this age.

IMPORTANT HEALTH NOTE: Seek immediate veterinary care if milk seems to be coming out of the kitten's nostrils or she immediately spits it back up. These could be signs of a cleft palate or other congenital issue.

How to burp a kitten after feeding

As long as kittens are eating formula, you will have to burp them. Put them on your shoulder or on their stomachs and pat them on the back gently until you feel them burp.

Elimination



Kittens under 3-4 weeks old must be stimulated in order to go to the bathroom after each feeding. A healthy kitten will urinate almost every time you stimulate them and have a bowel movement once or twice a day.

- Use a cotton ball, tissue, or washcloth (do not use a material too rough or you could damage a kitten's fragile skin) to gently rub the kittens' genital and anal areas to stimulate urination and defecation. This is similar to a mother cat's tongue!
- As the kitten is going, continue to rub to encourage her to let it all out!
- If you notice the kittens are having trouble urinating or defecating, consult a veterinarian.

When kittens are around 4 weeks old, introduce a shallow litter box with non-clumping litter. Show kittens the litter box and put in a used cotton ball to help them understand that they're meant to do their business! Until you see them regularly use the litter box, continue stimulating them after every feeding.

Monitor kittens' progress

Weigh kittens regularly



It is critical to measure neonatal kittens' weight to ensure they're growing on pace! You can choose to weigh after every feeding, but be sure to weigh at least once every day.

- Use a digital scale with a towel on top and use your hands to ensure the kitten stays on the scale without weighing her down
- If kitten just can't sit still, place a bowl on the scale, tare it/zero it out, and then place the kitten inside.

KITTEN GROWTH RATE: A healthy neonatal kitten should gain about 7 to 14 grams every day. Contact your veterinarian if weight gain is significantly less than target, or the kitten is losing weight.

See our Kitten Progression Guide for specific milestone weights as kitten grows, starting on page 27.

HOW OLD IS THAT KITTEN?

For kittens, every day brings new growth. But with almost every milestone, they will have different needs! This guide will help you estimate a kitten's age so you can determine exactly what to do to help.

You'll find the physical signs to look for, the milestones kittens should hit at each age, and the basics of the specific care they will need. Find full information at alleycat.org/KittenProgression



Please remember: If kittens are with their mother cat outdoors, Leave Them Be. Learn more on page 9.

Disclaimer: Weights given are for healthy kittens nursing from their mother; malnourished kittens can weigh half as much. Use all physical characteristics to accurately estimate a kitten's age.

GABBY



NEWBORN



Characteristics

Weight	85-110 grams/2.9-3.9 ounces
Teeth	No teeth
Eyes	Closed
Ears	Folded
Other	Umbilical cord may be present

Behavior

Newborn kittens are completely helpless and rely on their mother cat—or you—for everything. They can't stand, keep themselves warm, eat, or eliminate waste on their own. However, they can purr and make distress calls. Newborn kittens spend 90 percent of their time sleeping and the other 10 percent eating.

During their first week, their senses of smell, hearing, and taste slowly start to develop and they may begin to wiggle around a little bit.

Care

Neonatal kittens—newborn to 4 weeks old—require round-the-clock care. Kittens this age cannot regulate their own body temperature, so ensure they have a safe heat source, like a heating pad or microwaved sock filled with rice, that is completely covered with a blanket or towel. Be sure kittens can move away from the heat if they want!

Feeding

Use specific kitten bottles to feed newborn kittens with kitten formula only. Feed kittens on their stomachs—never on their backs.

FEEDING FREQUENCY: Newborn kittens must be fed every 2 hours, around the clock. **Follow instructions on the formula for feeding amounts.**

See full information on page 23.



Bathroom habits

Newborns must be stimulated to burp and eliminate waste after every feeding.

See full information starting on page 25.

Socialization

If you are fostering the kittens with their mother cat, handle the kittens minimally to weigh them daily or clean them as needed. If their mother cat is not there, you will be handling the kittens for feeding and encouraging elimination. Always hold kittens gently but firmly, ensuring their entire bodies and heads are supported.

A neonatal kitten
San Jose, California



ONE WEEK



Characteristics

Weight	210-240 grams/7.4-8.5 ounces
Teeth	No teeth
Eyes	May start to open
Ears	May start to unfold
Other	Smaller than your hand

Behavior

At about 7 days old, kittens' ears will begin to unfold, and their eyes may start to open, though their eyesight is still unfocused. They have doubled their birth weight to around 8 ounces.

Kittens are becoming more aware of their surroundings, but they will huddle together for warmth and comfort and rarely venture far from their mother, their nest, or each other. They still sleep most of the time.

Care

Neonatal kittens—newborn to 4 weeks old—require round-the-clock care. Kittens this age cannot regulate their own body temperature, so ensure they have a safe heat source, like a heating pad or microwaved sock filled with rice, that is completely covered with a blanket or towel. Be sure kittens can move away from the heat if they want!

Feeding

Use specific kitten bottles to feed kitten formula. Feed kittens on their stomachs—never on their backs.

FEEDING FREQUENCY: Every 2 hours, round the clock, until 10 days old. Once kittens are older than 10 days, they can eat every 3 to 4 hours.

Follow instructions on the formula for feeding amounts.

See full information on page 23.



Bathroom habits

One-week-old kittens must be stimulated to burp and eliminate waste after every feeding.

See full information starting on page 25.

Socialization

If hand-raising kittens, handle them often at this age to encourage their social development. This helps them connect positive experiences with people.



TWO WEEKS



Characteristics

Weight	280-310 grams/9.8-10.9 ounces
Teeth	Incisors start to show
Eyes	Fully open and blue
Ears	Starting to unfold

Behavior

At 2 weeks old, kittens become more aware of their surroundings and begin to interact more with their siblings, if they have them. However, they still spend most of their time asleep. Their ears will continue to unfold, and their eyes are now open. You'll see that the kittens' eyes are blue! All kittens have blue eyes until their adult color becomes apparent, which might not be until they're 2 months old.

At this age, kittens' sense of smell is developing, and they will hiss at unfamiliar scents and sounds. They'll also knead with their paws, though they cannot yet retract their claws. They will start to play, gradually develop fine motor skills, and take their first unsteady steps.

Care

Neonatal kittens—newborn to 4 weeks old—require round-the-clock care. Kittens this age cannot regulate their own body temperature, so ensure they have a safe heat source, like a heating pad or microwaved sock filled with rice, that is completely covered with a blanket or towel. Be sure kittens can move away from the heat if they want!

Feeding

Use specific kitten bottles to feed kitten formula. Feed kittens on their stomachs—never on their backs.

FEEDING FREQUENCY: Kittens older than 10 days can eat every 3 to 4 hours. At about 18 days old, they can start to eat every 5 to 6 hours.

Follow instructions on the formula for feeding amounts.

See full information on page 23.



Bathroom habits

Two-week-old kittens must be stimulated to burp and eliminate waste after every feeding.

See full information starting on page 25.

Socialization

Handle the kittens often at this age to encourage their social development. This helps them connect positive experiences with people.

TILLY



THREE WEEKS



Characteristics

Weight	365-400 grams/12.8-14.1 ounces
Teeth	Canines and incisors coming in
Eyes	Fully open and blue
Ears	Fully upright
Other	Can determine gender of kittens; fur starting to fill out

Behavior

When kittens are 3 weeks old, their ears are finally fully upright and their blue eyes are fully open (their adult eye color does not set in until they are older, and might not happen until they're 2 months old!).

While the kittens' movements are still uncoordinated, they are playing more. You can begin to socialize them through toys and games, though be careful that no toys have pieces kittens can swallow. They still can't control claw retraction.

Care

Neonatal kittens—newborn to 4 weeks old—require round-the-clock care. Kittens this age cannot regulate their own body temperature, so ensure they have a safe heat source, like a heating pad or microwaved sock filled with rice, that is completely covered with a blanket or towel. Be sure kittens can move away from the heat if they want!

Feeding

At 3 weeks old, you can start introducing wet food to kittens. Mix the wet food with kitten formula to get the ball rolling. Either let the kittens eat the mixture themselves from a dish or feed it to them with kitten-specific bottles. If feeding with a bottle, feed kittens on their stomachs—never their backs—and tilt the bottle.



FEEDING FREQUENCY: Every 5 to 6 hours. Kittens of this age will eat much more at each feeding, but you'll feed them less frequently.

Follow instructions on the formula for feeding amounts.

See full information on page 23.

Bathroom habits

At this age, kittens can start to eliminate waste on their own. It's time to introduce a small, shallow litter box with a layer of non-clumping litter. Show kittens the litter box and they should quickly start using it out of instinct. To help them out, stimulate a kitten to go to the bathroom like before and put the soiled cotton ball into the litter.

Socialization

Handle the kittens often at this age to encourage their social development. This helps them connect positive experiences with people. Kittens of this age show interest in their surroundings and interact with their littermates, people, and toys. They're very playful, and play is a critical part of socializing a kitten. Get plenty of hands-on time and playtime at this age!



FOUR WEEKS



Characteristics

Weight	440-470 grams/15.5-16.6 ounces
Teeth	Canines and incisors in
Eyes	Blue
Ears	Fully upright

Behavior

Once kittens grow past 4 weeks, they're no longer considered neonatal. If you've been raising the kittens for a few weeks already, congratulations—the hardest part is over! Kittens at this age are steady on their feet and hold their tails up. They will start to explore their surroundings more and play frequently with each other, toys, and people.

As an important milestone, kittens of this age will start weaning. That means they'll slowly start to eat solid food. This age is also great for litter box training!

Care

Neonatal kittens—newborn to 4 weeks old—require round-the-clock care. Kittens this age cannot regulate their own body temperature, so ensure they have a safe heat source, like a heating pad or microwaved sock filled with rice, that is completely covered with a blanket or towel.

Be sure kittens can move away from the heat if they want!

Feeding

When kittens are 4 weeks old, it's time to start getting serious about the weaning process! Mix kitten formula with wet food and either let the kittens eat it themselves from a dish or feed them the mixture with a kitten-specific bottle or syringe. Gradually, adjust the mixture so it's more wet



food and less formula. Once the kittens can eat wet food, start mixing formula with dry food, too. **IMPORTANT:** Make sure the wet and dry food are formulated specifically for kittens! The food's packaging should indicate if it is.

When the kittens are eating solid food, make sure you always provide them with water. Continue to burp kittens if needed, as long as they are continuing to eat formula.

FEEDING FREQUENCY: 2 or 3 times a day, like an adult cat! **Follow instructions on formula and/or food for feeding amounts.**

Bathroom habits

Start litter box training in earnest, if you haven't already. Provide the kittens with a small, shallow litter pan with non-clumping litter. Show kittens the litter box and they should quickly start using it out of instinct. To help them out, put in one of the cotton balls that you used to help them urinate.

Socialization

Handle the kittens often at this age to encourage their social development. Petting, play, toys, and other mental stimulation is critical at this age! Food is a great tool to develop a kitten's bond with people: stay in the room and keep plates of food close to you. Pet the kittens while they eat.

COMMUNITY KITTEN



 Alley Cat Allies

FIVE WEEKS



Characteristics

Weight	525-550 grams/18.5-19.5 ounces
Teeth	Premolars coming in
Eyes	Blue
Ears	Fully upright

Behavior

Five weeks old is when the fun really begins! Kittens are extremely playful at this age, especially now that their eyesight is fully developed and their coordination is better. Kittens can now retract their claws at will, and you can see them develop their own distinct personalities.

As they near 6 weeks old, kittens will become completely stable on their feet, using their tails to balance. They'll start stalking, hiding, pouncing, and digging—instantual behaviors in all cats, whether they grow up indoors or outdoors.

Care

Kittens can regulate their own body temperature now, but you should still provide a cozy nest they can go to as needed.

Feeding

Kittens should now be weaned and eating wet food mixed with baby cat kibble. Provide them a dish of water at all times.



FEEDING FREQUENCY: 2 or 3 times a day. If needed, supplement with kitten formula. **Follow instructions on food for feeding amounts.**

If still transitioning kittens from formula to solid food, it is important to feed them a mix of both so that they don't have digestive issues due to a sudden change in diet. Gradually decrease the amount of formula and increase solid food over the course of a week. **IMPORTANT:** Make sure the food is formulated specifically for kittens!

Bathroom habits

Kittens should use the litter box at this age. Provide them with a small, shallow litter pan with non-clumping litter.

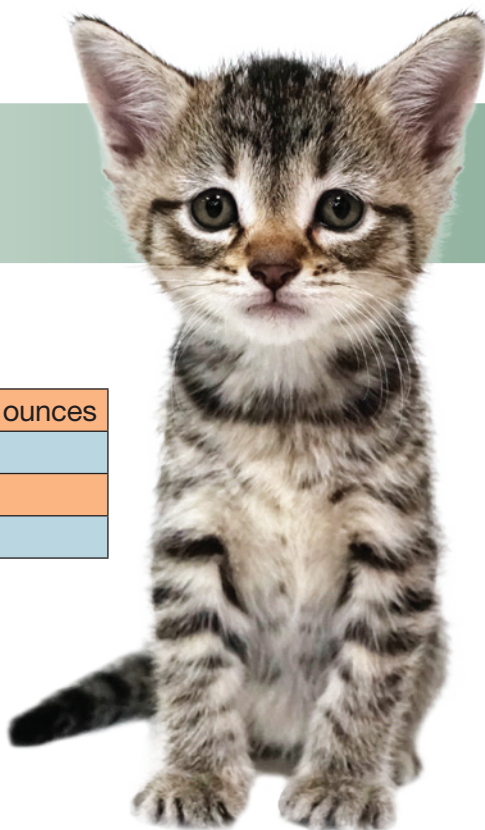
Socialization

Socializing kittens becomes more important as they get older so they have the skills to thrive in their homes when they are adopted. Without proper and early socialization, kittens will not become socialized to people and will not be adoptable. Playing is an important part of kitten socialization because it helps them bond with each other and build confidence around people.

ELAINE AND GEORGE



SIX WEEKS



Characteristics

Weight	640-670 grams/22.5-23.6 ounces
Teeth	Premolars coming in
Eyes	Blue
Ears	Fully upright

Behavior

When kittens are 6 weeks old, things get easier for their caregivers. The kittens will be able to clean themselves (and groom each other to reinforce their sibling bonds) and should be using the litter box.

At this age, kittens can run well and are very active and playful. Though they should be weaned and are becoming more self-sufficient, they may still nurse and seek comfort from their mother, if she is present.

Care

Kittens can regulate their own temperature now, but you should still provide a cozy nest they can go to as needed. When kittens are 6 weeks old, you can set up their first regular veterinarian appointments for check ups! This is when a vaccination plan can begin. Learn more starting on page 5!

Feeding

Kittens who are 6 weeks old should eat kitten kibble mixed into wet food. You can start to separate the wet food and kibble, but do so gradually so the kittens won't have digestive problems.

FEEDING FREQUENCY: 2 or 3 times a day. **Follow instructions on food for amount to feed. IMPORTANT:** Make sure the food is formulated specifically for kittens!



Bathroom habits

Kittens should use the litter box.

Socialization

Socializing kittens becomes more important as they get older, so they have the skills to thrive in their homes when they are adopted. Play with kittens frequently and handle/hold them so they are very used to human contact! Start to familiarize them with routine activities, like nail clipping.

Grooming

At 6 weeks old, kittens are grooming each other as an important bonding behavior. Imitate that by making sure you incorporate grooming into your interactions with the kittens—especially if you have a single kitten or are raising a litter without the mother cat.

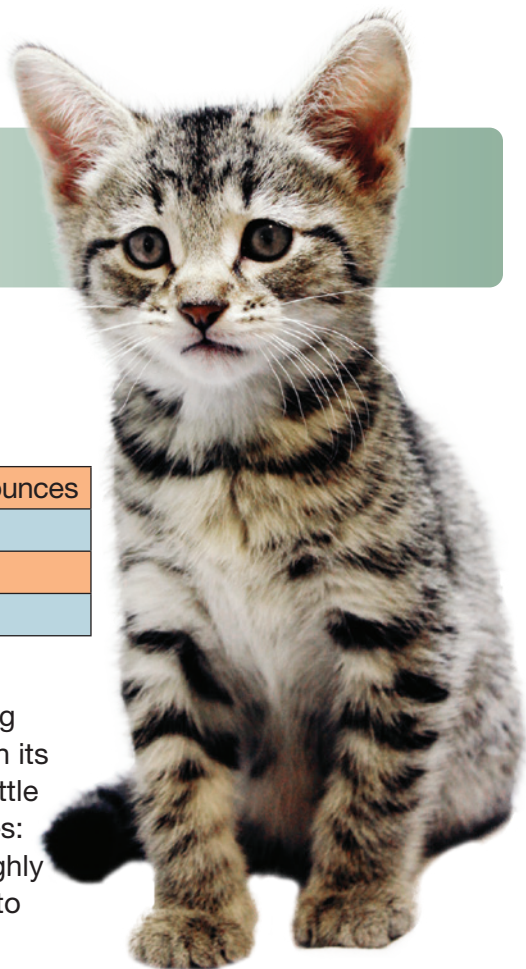
Introductions

Introduce kittens to different parts of the house, different objects, different pets and people, and different experiences. This will help them adjust to new situations.

Introduce the kittens to scratching posts and trim their claws for the first time. Training the kittens to understand these routines helps prepare them for their new homes.



SEVEN WEEKS



Characteristics

Weight	770-800 grams/27.1-28.2 ounces
Teeth	Premolars in
Eyes	May change color
Ears	Fully upright

Behavior

Seven-week-old kittens are becoming more independent, which comes with its advantages—you're probably not bottle feeding anymore—and disadvantages: they're now very curious and also highly mobile and coordinated. You'll have to keep a close eye on them.

At this age, the kittens' adult eye color may start to emerge!

Care

At about 54 days old, kittens are at the height of their eye-paw coordination, leading them to try more daring and complex actions. Keep an eye on them and make sure they are safely cordoned off from areas in a home that may pose a hazard to them. Consider a playpen, but give them plenty of space to run around and remember: they're gaining skills in climbing!

Feeding

Kittens who are 7 weeks old should be eating kitten kibble and wet food. They can eat kibble and wet food mixed together at first, but you can slowly start to separate them. Do it gradually so the kittens won't have digestive problems.



FEEDING FREQUENCY: 2 or 3 times a day. **Follow instructions on food for amount to feed. IMPORTANT:** Make sure the food is formulated specifically for kittens!

Bathroom habits

Kittens should use the litter box.

Socialization

Socializing kittens becomes more important as they get older, so they have the skills to thrive in their homes when they are adopted. Continue to handle the kittens regularly, including petting and holding. Familiarize them with having their nails clipped and other routine activities.

Make sure you incorporate grooming into your interactions with the kittens, especially if you have a single kitten or are raising a litter without the mother cat.

Introductions

Introduce kittens to different parts of the house, different objects, different pets and people, and different experiences. All help them adjust to new situations.

If you haven't already, introduce the kittens to scratching posts and trim their claws for the first time. Training the kittens to understand these routines helps prepare them for their new homes.

BO AND SATI



EIGHT WEEKS



Characteristics

Weight	920-950 grams/32.4-33.5 ounces (2 pounds)
Teeth	26 baby teeth
Eyes	Any color
Ears	Fully upright

Behavior

Eight weeks is a milestone age for kittens. They should weigh about two pounds, and are at the absolute youngest age they can be spayed or neutered. They're also fully weaned (you're done with bottle feeding) and look more like adult cats. It's a good time to start looking for their adoptive homes.

Kittens' growth rate will start to slow at this point. They will continue to develop muscle tone and strength, but won't be doubling their weight in a matter of days or weeks anymore.

Care

At this age, kittens explore confidently and jump. They are becoming more skilled and adventurous and will sleep and eat at regular intervals like adult cats. Keep a close eye on them and keep them cordoned off from areas of the home that can pose a hazard to them. They'll need plenty of space to run and play!

You can start looking for their adoptive homes but if kittens are with their siblings and/or their mother, do not actually separate them from their siblings for another three weeks or so to support their continued development and growth.



Feeding

The kittens should be eating exclusively solid food.

FEEDING FREQUENCY: Regular intervals, 2 or 3 times a day. **Follow instructions on food for amount to feed.** **IMPORTANT:** Make sure the food is formulated specifically for kittens!

Bathroom habits

Kittens should use the litter box.

Socialization

Socializing kittens becomes more important as they get older, so they have the skills to thrive in their homes when they are adopted. Continue to handle the kittens regularly, including petting and holding. Familiarize them with having their nails clipped and other routine activities.

Introductions

Introduce kittens to different parts of the house, different objects, different pets and people, and different experiences. All help them adjust to new situations.



NINE WEEKS



Characteristics

Weight	1060-1090 grams/ 37.3-38.4 ounces
Teeth	26 baby teeth
Eyes	Any color
Ears	Fully upright

Behavior

Kittens are so grown up by 9 weeks old! Their adult eye color should be apparent, and they exhibit all the behaviors and body language of adult cats. Kittens of this age like to stalk toys and they may begin to react to catnip.

Socialized kittens at this age should clearly show an attachment to their caregivers, cuddling on laps and seeking out attention. They're almost ready for adoption!

Care

At this age, kittens explore confidently and jump. They are becoming more skilled and adventurous and will sleep and eat at regular intervals like adult cats. Keep a close eye on them and keep them cordoned off from areas of the home that can pose a hazard to them. They'll need plenty of space to run and play!

Start securing adoptive homes, but do not actually separate them from their siblings or their mother (if they are present) for another couple of weeks to support their continued development and growth.

Feeding

Eating exclusively solid food.



FEEDING FREQUENCY: Regular intervals, 2 or 3 times a day. **Follow instructions on food for amount to feed.** **IMPORTANT:** Make sure the food is formulated specifically for kittens!

Bathroom habits

Kittens should use the litter box.

Socialization

If you found kittens outdoors this age and they are not socialized, it is completely fine to return them to their feline families outdoors as community cats. Just make sure they are healthy and have been spayed or neutered. Learn more on page 12.

If you are raising kittens indoors, continue to handle the kittens regularly, including petting and holding. Familiarize them with having their nails clipped and other routine activities. It's time to get serious about finding their adoptive homes!



TEN WEEKS



Characteristics

Weight	1210-1240 grams/ 42.6-43.7 ounces
Teeth	26 baby teeth
Eyes	Any color
Ears	Fully upright

Behavior

At 10 weeks old, the kittens are grown up and fully mobile! They are ready to go to their new homes—just make sure the adopters agree to spay or neuter them before they are 4 months old.

If you've raised the kittens from newborn to this point, congratulations! You've done the hard work that will allow them to thrive as healthy and happy cats.

Care

At this age, kittens explore confidently and jump. They are becoming more skilled and adventurous and will sleep and eat at regular intervals like adult cats. Keep a close eye on them and keep them cordoned off from areas of the home that can pose a hazard to them. They'll need plenty of space to run and play!

Start securing adoptive homes. While kittens can be adopted at this age, you can also keep them for a couple weeks longer with their siblings or their mother (if they are present) to support their continued development and growth.



Feeding

Eating exclusively solid food.

FEEDING FREQUENCY: Regular intervals, 2 or 3 times a day. **Follow instructions on food for amount to feed. IMPORTANT:** Make sure the food is formulated specifically for kittens!

Bathroom habits

Kittens should use the litter box.

Socialization

If you found kittens outdoors this age and they are not socialized, it is completely fine to return them to their feline families outdoors as community cats. Just make sure they are healthy and have been spayed or neutered.

If you are raising kittens indoors, continue to handle the kittens regularly, including petting and holding. Familiarize them with having their nails clipped and other routine activities.

Introductions

Continue to introduce kittens to different parts of the house, different objects, different pets and people, and different experiences. All help them adjust to new situations.



THANK YOU

for your dedication and compassion toward kittens!

The reality of kitten season—and year-long, in many cases—is that young kittens are at high risk and too many well-meaning people don't know the right steps to take to help them. Now that you've read this guide, you can be a lifesaving source of knowledge in your community!

If you are spreading the word about the information in this guide...

If you are helping a mother cat stay comfortable and raise her kittens outdoors...

If you have decided to become a caregiver to neonatal kittens...

You are a true advocate, hero, and inspiration!

What to do next



- Stay up to date on the latest information and news to protect kittens by joining our movement: alleycat.org/SignUp



- Find local resources to help you save kittens: GetHelp.alleycat.org



- Find our full kitten care information: alleycat.org/KittenProgression



- Get the quick guide to helping kittens outdoors: alleycat.org/FoundAKitten



- Learn the tips and tricks to kitten socialization: alleycat.org/Socialization





- Learn more about why kittens belong with their mother cat: alleycat.org/LeaveThemBe



- Give to help Alley Cat Allies protect more kittens, during kitten season and year-round: alleycat.org/Donate

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Danbury, Connecticut





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