

NEONATAL KITTEN CARE



Adams County Animal Shelter

Program Goals

- ❑ To improve care and survival rate for orphaned bottle baby kittens that come to the shelter
- ❑ To provide information and training to foster parents, volunteers, and staff
- ❑ Adopt out healthy and behaviorally sound kittens



HOW OLD IS THAT KITTEN?



Kittens are adorable at any age, but did you know that figuring out how old a kitten is can help determine what sort of care they need? It can be tricky to tell, but our at-a-glance kitten progression chart, featuring Darling the kitten, is here to help you out!



NEWBORN **ONE WEEK** **TWO WEEKS** **THREE WEEKS** **FOUR WEEKS**

When kittens are first born they are completely helpless—their eyes are closed, their ears are folded, and they can't stand, keep themselves warm or eat on their own. They rely on mom for everything!

Darling is starting to become more aware of his surroundings! At about seven days old, a kitten's ears will unfold and their eyes may start to open.

Look at those blue peepers! Darling's eyes are fully open, and he is taking his first wobbly steps. Kittens this age start interacting more with each other, but still need mom.

Darling's now playing with his siblings and getting more mobile. You should be able to tell if kittens are boys or girls. You can start providing a litter box and wet food.

Look how much Darling has grown! At four weeks kittens are sturdy on their feet and playing with each other, toys, and people.



FIVE WEEKS **SIX WEEKS** **SEVEN WEEKS** **EIGHT WEEKS** **NINE WEEKS** **TEN WEEKS**

Get ready for a lot of fun! Darling is now full of energy and plays exuberantly. Interacting with people is important for kittens at this age. Darling is developing lots of personality!

Every day Darling is getting more sure of himself through socialization and play. He's using the litter box and eating cat food — though he still visits mom for snacks and comfort.

Darling is almost fully weaned, and continues to play and learn. Being introduced to new people, places in the home, and other pets is an important part of socialization.

Two pounds! Darling now weighs enough to be neutered. He's also getting more skilled and adventurous. Darling is learning so much from his mom, siblings, and human caregiver.

Looking pretty grown-up, Darling! At this age kittens are behaving and using their body language like adult cats. Darling is eating all solid food, and his eyes have gone from blue to yellow.

Darling is fully weaned, neutered, and—because he was socialized to people—ready for his loving adoptive home. They grow up so fast!

Get even more details (and cute pics!) with our week-by-week kitten progression resource at

alleycat.org/KittenProgression

How old am I?



Rounded ears

Eyes open

Beginning to
crawl and/or
walk

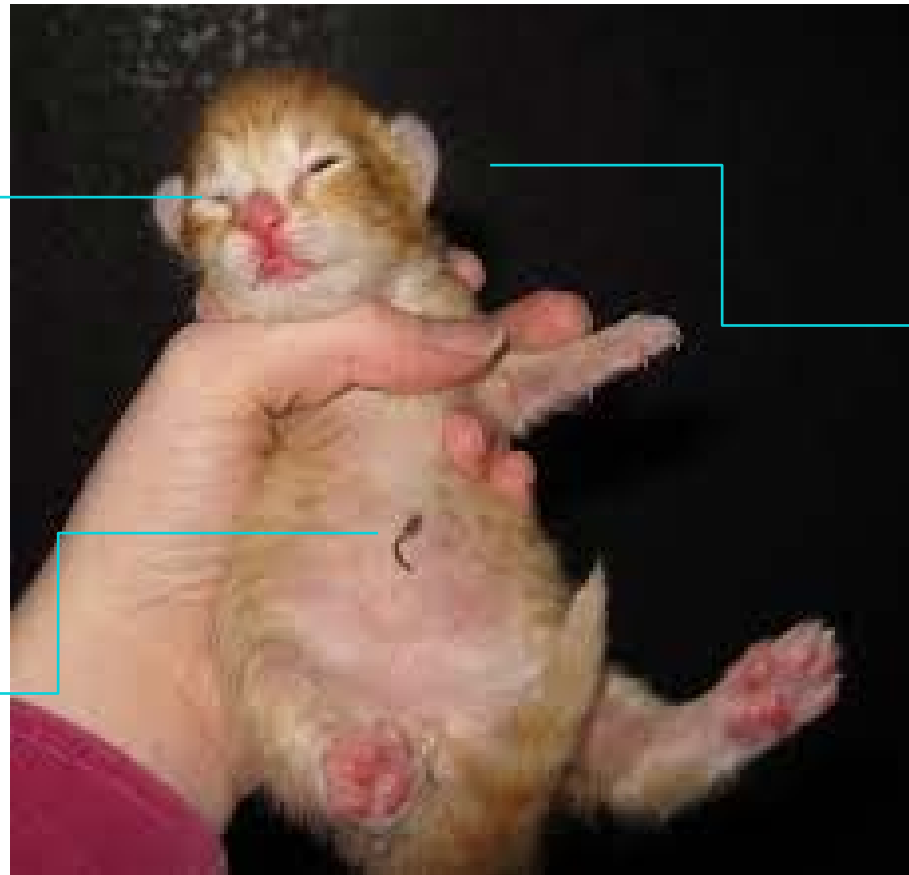
2-3 weeks

How old am I?

Eyes Closed

Ears Flat to Head

Umbilical Cord
Attached, Dry



~3 Days

Bottle Baby Supplies

- 🐾 KMR Dry powdered formula
- 🐾 Nursing bottle or *Miracle* nipples and syringes for small babies
- 🐾 Rice bag or Snugglesafe
- 🐾 Plenty of soft, clean towels and bedding
- 🐾 Hard sided cat carrier, plastic tote, or playpen
- 🐾 Karo Corn Syrup for emergencies
- 🐾 Exam gloves if desired
- 🐾 Unscented, natural baby wipes (ex. WaterWipes) or soft tissues
- 🐾 Dawn dish soap
- 🐾 Pet safe cleaners for sanitizing

Bottle Baby Supplies - Extras

- ❑ Stuffed mama with heartbeat
- ❑ Toothbrush (can be used for grooming babies)
- ❑ Unflavored Pedialyte
- ❑ Bulb syringe to help congested babies
- ❑ Thermometer

Setting up for bottle babies

- ❧ Keep bottle babies in a secure space such as a cat carrier, small playpen, or other enclosure when you are not feeding or caring for them
- ❧ Enclosure should be kept in a warm, draft-free room away from other pets



Setting up for bottle babies

- ❧ Enclosure should be large enough to fit a warmie wrapped in towels, and an area to move away from the heat source if kittens get too warm
- ❧ Kittens should have clean, fresh bedding at all times



Setting up for older kittens

Pop-up wire kennel or
secure room



Fresh food and
water

Elevated surfaces, hidey
box, toys

Litter box with non-
clumping litter

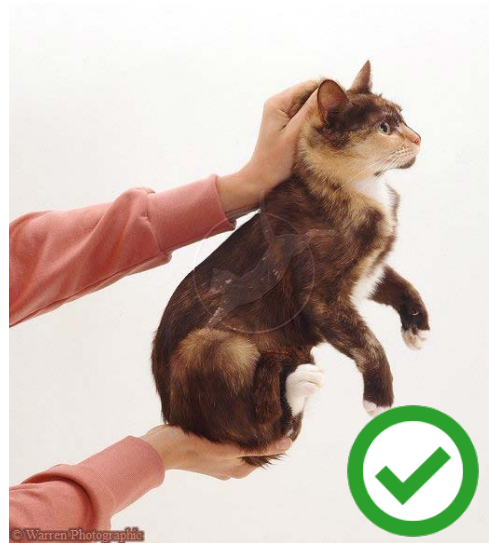
Safe handling



- ❑ Do not lift your kitten by the scruff alone
- ❑ Do not try to carry more than one kitten at a time
- ❑ Always be aware of the location of your kittens

Safe handling

- Always use both hands or wrap your kitten securely in a towel when holding them
- Sit on the floor in a secure, kitten proofed room if you want to interact with all your kittens at once
- Young children should only handle kittens under adult supervision and while sitting on the floor



Feeding

- ❃ ACAS feeds primarily KMR powdered formula
- ❃ Keep powdered formula in freezer when not in use, discard powder after 6 months
- ❃ Reconstitute using 1 part formula to 2 parts warm water
- ❃ Reconstituted formula must be kept refrigerated. Discard if left at room temperature longer than 15 minutes
- ❃ Discard refrigerated, reconstituted formula after 24 hours
- ❃ Be sure all chunks of dry formula are fully dissolved



“Who’s hungry?”

Feeding

- 🐾 Warm refrigerated formula by placing the bottle in a hot water bath
- 🐾 Test temperature of milk by placing a drop on your inner wrist
- 🐾 Never feed cow's milk
- 🐾 Only feed shelter approved kitten formula



Feeding



- 🐾 When using a new bottle, be sure to cut an X in the tip of the bottle nipple using small, sharp scissors
- 🐾 Test the flow by turning the bottle upside down- formula should drip slowly out of the hole

Feeding

- For smaller babies, a miracle nipple and syringe is recommended over a bottle
- Especially for young/small babies, syringe ensures you are feeding the correct amount



Feeding

- ❧ Kitten should be on his stomach, imagine how he would lay next to his mother for nursing
- ❧ You can also hold the kitten upright, tipped slightly forward in a warm towel
- ❧ Hold bottle or syringe at a 45 degree angle



Feeding

- ❧ When feeding with a syringe, hold syringe in “hitch-hiker” position with your dominant hand
- ❧ Hold kitten in position with your other hand
- ❧ Do not force milk into the kitten’s mouth



Feeding

- ❧ Gently place the bottle in the kitten's mouth and move it back and forth
- ❧ If at first you don't succeed, wait a few minutes and try again
- ❧ If your kitten still won't nurse, try stroking his back or gently rubbing his forehead
- ❧ If THAT doesn't work, try placing a drop of Karo syrup on the kitten's gums to jump start their blood sugar and repeat the previous steps
- ❧ If kitten still won't nurse, contact the Foster Coordinator or shelter veterinary staff immediately



Cleanliness

- 🐾 Always wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before and after feeding
- 🐾 Wear latex exam gloves if desired
- 🐾 To prevent spreading diseases between household pets and kittens, wear an old robe, sweatshirt, etc. for kitten feeding time



Cleanliness

- Ask visitors to the home to remove shoes, wash hands, and wear clean clothes when visiting kittens
- If friends/extended family have recently treated or lost a pet with a contagious illness, please ask them not to visit your kittens



How much should my kitten eat?

Estimated Age	Weight (grams)	Weight (ounces)	20 kcal/100 g body weight ¹	Daily volume Commercial milk replacer (ml) Concentration 0.74 kcal/ml ¹	Stomach capacity (ml) (4ml/100 g body weight ¹)	Approx. number of feedings per day ^{**}
Newborn	50	1.8	10	13.5	2	7
	75	2.6	15	20	3	7
	100	3.5	20	27	4	7
	125	4.4	25	34	5	7
~ 1 weeks	150	5.3	30	40	6	7
	175	6.2	35	47	7	7
	200	7.0	40	54	8	7
	225	8.0	45	61	9	7
~ 2 weeks	250	8.8	50	68	10	7
	275	9.7	55	74	11	7
	300	10.6	60	81	12	6-7
	325	11.5	65	88	13	6-7
~ 3 weeks	350	12.3	70	95	14	6-7
	375	13.2	75	101	15	~6
	400	14.1	80	108	16	~5
	425	15.0	85	115	17	~5
~ 4 weeks ^{***}	450	15.9	90	122	18	~5
	475	16.8	95	128	19	~4
	500	17.6	100	135	20	~4
~ 5 weeks ^{***}	525	18.5	105	142	21	~4
	550	19.4	110	148	22	~4

How much should my kitten eat (a little simpler!)

kitten weight and feeding chart

AGE	WEIGHT	AMOUNT PER FEEDING	SCHEDULE
0-1 week	50-150 grams	2-6 ml	Every 2 hours
1-2 weeks	150-250 grams	6-10 ml	Every 2-3 hours
2-3 weeks	250-350 grams	10-14 ml	Every 3-4 hours
3-4 weeks	350-450 grams	14-18 ml	Every 4-5 hours
4-5 weeks	450-550 grams	18-22 ml	Every 5-6 hours
5-8 weeks	550-850 grams	(weaning; offer ample wet food)	Every 6 hours

Tracking is helpful!

- 🐾 Weigh kittens daily to calculate how much formula they need
- 🐾 Kittens should ideally gain at least $\frac{1}{4}$ oz per day
- 🐾 If kittens have not gained weight for 2 consecutive days, contact the Foster Coordinator or shelter vet staff
- 🐾 Bottles are marked with measurements
- 🐾 8 mL of formula per ounce of body weight daily
- 🐾 Do not overfeed as it can cause diarrhea, bloating, etc.

I'm done,
thanks.



Feeding

- 🐾 A full kitten will look “pear shaped” with a belly that is round, but not hard or distended
- 🐾 Small or weak kittens may eat less per feeding but need more frequent feedings
- 🐾 If feeding multiple kittens, feed each kitten until they stop nursing and then repeat
- 🐾 Feed picky eaters first and then come back to them at the end
- 🐾 1-3 rounds of nursing is usually enough

Your kitten should look satisfied and pleasantly plump



Suckling

- 🐾 Young kittens may suckle on each other reflexively
- 🐾 This behavior is normal, but watch carefully to make sure they are not damaging the fur or skin of their littermate
- 🐾 Kittens need to be separated if they are suckling each other enough to cause hair loss or sores



Weaning

- 🐾 Start at 3 1/2 to 4 weeks of age, some kittens may not wean until 5 weeks
- 🐾 Offer kittens formula in a spoon or flat saucer
- 🐾 Some kittens catch on right away, others take time



Weaning



- ❃ Once they are lapping their formula, begin adding a small amount of canned food to the formula at each feeding
- ❃ Slowly increase amount of canned food and decrease the amount of formula every day
- ❃ Offer multiple options for food
- ❃ Make a warm slurry of KMR and wet food and feed using nursing bottle

Weaning

- ❗ If kittens have diarrhea, decrease amount of canned food and add some extra water to the gruel (up to 3-4 parts water per part KMR)
- ❗ Always leave a shallow dish of fresh water available for kittens once they start eating solid food/gruel



Hydration

- 🐾 Check your kittens' hydration often
- 🐾 Gently pull up on skin on the back of the head/neck and release
- 🐾 If skin bounces back easily, kitten is well hydrated
- 🐾 If skin stays up or goes down very slowly, kitten may be dehydrated
- 🐾 Can also check gums to see if they are “sticky” or “tacky”
- 🐾 Contact Foster Coordinator or shelter vet staff right away if your kitten is dehydrated



Potty time

- ❃ Bottle baby kittens cannot eliminate on their own
- ❃ Mimic momma's cleaning duties by gently rubbing your kitten's lower belly, genital, and anal area with a soft, warm, damp cloth or unscented baby wipe



Potty time

- 🐾 Stimulate kittens after every feeding
- 🐾 Kittens should urinate after every feeding but may only have a bowel movement 1-2 times per day
- 🐾 Track elimination in your care log
- 🐾 Contact the Foster Coordinator or shelter vet staff if your kitten is not eliminating normally

Potty time

- 🐾 Almost clear or light yellow urine → normal!

Normal

- 🐾 Dark yellow or brown urine → kitten may be dehydrated. Call or text the foster phone

Dehydrated

Dehydrated

- 🐾 Bloody or cloudy urine → kitten may have a UTI. Call or text the foster phone.

UTI

The scoop on poop

- ❗ For kittens under 3 weeks, stool should be soft but formed



Toothpaste consistency is normal for bottle babies

- ❗ Call/text foster phone if stool is runny/liquid or very hard/chalky and kitten is straining to defecate
- ❗ Call/text foster phone if there is blood in the stool

Litterbox training

- ❧ Can start when kittens are 3-4 weeks old
- ❧ Use a low sided cardboard box
- ❧ Only use non-clumping clay litter!
- ❧ Place kittens in the box after feeding to allow them to feel the litter
- ❧ Stimulate kitten over the litter and leave a small amount of output so they can find their “bathroom”
- ❧ Keep litterbox away from food and water
- ❧ Often kittens will begin to use the box on their own within a few days



Cleaning your kitten

- 🐾 Gently clean urine, feces, and formula off your kitten with a warm, soft, damp cloth or unscented baby wipe
- 🐾 Do not use soap or pet shampoo
- 🐾 Clean kittens after every feeding/potting so they don't get urine scald
- 🐾 If mess does not come off with gentle wiping, add a few drops of Dawn dish soap to a cup of warm water and try again
- 🐾 Rinse off dilute soap thoroughly
- 🐾 Make sure your kitten is fully dry and warm after cleaning!



Cleaning your kitten

- ❗ Kittens may get discharge in or around their eyes
- ❗ Gently wipe off discharge with a warm damp cloth
- ❗ Never use soap (even diluted) near your kitten's eyes

This is humiliating.



Cleaning

- ❗ Wash your kitten's bedding separately from household bedding
- ❗ Use detergent and bleach to clean kitten bedding
- ❗ Do not mix bleach with cleaning agents that contain ammonia



When to call the Foster phone for help:

- 🐾 Diarrhea
- 🐾 Constipation
- 🐾 Straining to urinate or not urinating
- 🐾 Vomiting
- 🐾 URI symptoms (runny nose, goopy eyes, wheezing, constant sneezing)
- 🐾 Not eating
- 🐾 Lethargy
- 🐾 Change in attitude or behavior
- 🐾 Hair loss
- 🐾 Anything you are worried/concerned about

Loving care and enrichment

- ❧ Physical and emotional contact is important for your kitten!
- ❧ Cuddling and gentle petting are good ways to bond with bottle babies
- ❧ Once kittens are older (3-4 weeks), incorporate playtime and enrichment into your routine



Loving care and enrichment

- ❧ Always use kitten-safe toys
- ❧ Toilet paper rolls are safe, fun, and free toys!
- ❧ Kittens love to explore boxes and hiding places
- ❧ Offer older kittens (6+ weeks) safe elevated surfaces and hiding spots to explore



Wellness/Vaccine check ups

- ❧ Kittens can get their first set of vaccines at 4 weeks old
- ❧ Vaccine boosters are needed every 2 weeks
- ❧ Schedule vaccine/wellness appointments by emailing the Foster Coordinator
- ❧ Please stick to the vaccine schedule! Kittens can get sick if they get vaccines less than 2 weeks apart, and need to start over from the beginning if they go more than 3 weeks between boosters

This patient needs a CAT scan



Common kitten illnesses

- ❧ Upper respiratory infection
 - ❧ Sneezing, nasal discharge, poor appetite, dehydration
- ❧ Eye infections
 - ❧ Green discharge, “weepy” eyes, redness/swelling around eyes
- ❧ Diarrhea
 - ❧ Can be diet related or caused by a parasite



Fading Kitten Syndrome

- ❗ Ideal body temp is 100 to 102 degrees
- ❗ Symptoms: low body temp, extreme lethargy, gasping, meowing/crying out
- ❗ Cause: hypothermia or hypoglycemia
- ❗ If kitten is cold and unresponsive, take action!



Fading Kitten Protocol

- 🐾 Get your kitten warm
 - 🐾 Wrap them in a towel “burrito” leaving only their face exposed
 - 🐾 Wrap a heating pad turned to low around the burrito as an extra source of heat
 - 🐾 Do not unwrap your kitten until they are warm!
- 🐾 Get their blood sugar up
 - 🐾 Once your kitten is warm place 3 drops of Karo syrup on their gums. Repeat every 3 minutes.



Fading Kitten Syndrome

- 🐾 Notify us on the foster phone: 720-515-3834
 - 🐾 We may not have any new advice, but let us know!
- 🐾 It can take hours for kittens to improve
- 🐾 Keep in mind that even with the best possible care, some kittens still won't make it
- 🐾 Don't blame yourself! Any foster kitten you have cared for got a second chance because of you!

Panleukopenia

- ❃ Viral infection, most often seen in kittens or unvaccinated cats
- ❃ Contagious to other cats but not humans or dogs
- ❃ Symptoms: fever, diarrhea, vomiting, lack of appetite, fading, lethargy
- ❃ If your kitten has two or more of these symptoms, call the foster line immediately



Ringworm

- ❃ Fungal skin infection
- ❃ Contagious to other animals and people
- ❃ Causes flaky/crusty hair loss in cats
- ❃ Most commonly seen on head/ears, feet, and tail, but can appear anywhere on body
- ❃ Please contact foster phone if you notice any hair loss on your kitten



Medicating your kitten

- Only give meds as prescribed by staff
- Most medications will be a liquid administered orally
- Never tilt the cat's head back as you administer meds because they can aspirate
- Administer through the side of the mouth instead of straight to the back of the throat

Other tips and tricks

- ❑ Train a few friends the basics for when you are overwhelmed
- ❑ Enlist the help of family members
- ❑ Get to know other foster parents and ask for help if you need it!
- ❑ When babies are older/stable, can move to “flex” feeding times



Contact information

- 🐾 Foster Phone: (720) 515-3834
 - 🐾 Connected to the Foster Coordinator or shelter medical staff's cell 24/7
 - 🐾 Texting or calling are both fine
 - 🐾 Please only call/text after business hours for urgent concerns (ex. Very sick or injured foster pet, escaped foster pet, bite)
 - 🐾 Please call in time sensitive emergencies and leave a voicemail

🐾 Email: Jbishopp@adcogov.org

🐾 Great for general questions, sharing photos and information, scheduling vaccine appointments

Any questions?

