

Neonatal Kitten Guide



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Overview

A neonatal kitten is one that is less than 5 weeks old. At this age, they are heavily dependent upon their mothers. But in some unfortunate instances, they end up without a mother cat and will need a human to give them the care that they need. They can be aged as per below.

Age	Description
Newborn	Umbilical cord attached, eyes closed, ears closed, weigh approx. 100g, sleep most of the time
1 Week	No umbilical cord, eyes are closed, ears are open, unable to walk, sleep majority of the time
2 Weeks	Eyes start to open between 10-14 days (blue in colour), ears fully open, starting to crawl.
3 Weeks	Starting to urinate on their own, canine teeth coming through, taking wobbly steps
4 Weeks	Toilet by themselves, start playing and balance improves, start the weaning process
5 Weeks	Should be fully weaned off the bottle. Back teeth coming through, true eye colour showing. More lively, playing and exploring.

Supplies

Below is a list of supplies needed to care for neonatal kittens. AWL NSW can provide a carrier, heat source, formula, bottles and teats for Kemps Creek foster carers. Contact the Welfare Officer for the AWL NSW branch you are fostering for to see what they supply.

Item	Notes
Carrier	When selecting a carrier, ensure that the holes in the bars are not too wide as a neonatal kitten could easily get their head stuck. It is best to use a plastic carrier as it's easier to disinfect.
Heat source	Neonatal kittens can't generate their own heat so a heat disc or hot water bottle is needed.
Blankets & Towels	It is good to make a thick nest for the kittens to assist with keeping them warm. These will need to be changed at least once a day and will need to be bleached between litters.
Bottle & Teats	A bottle, and multiple sizes and shapes of teats can help as some kittens can be fussy.

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Kitten milk formula and scoop	Store in a dry, cool place, check container is secure to prevent pests/contamination. We use Di-Vetelact or Wombaroo at AWL NSW, DO NOT buy or use supermarket formula or 'kitten milk'.
Scales	A small set to allow for regular monitoring of kitten weight gain/loss.
Make-up pads/swabs	These are to be used to stimulate the kittens to eliminate.
Bowl	A bowl to put kittens in for weighing, and also to put them in whilst changing the bedding in a carrier. This reduces the amount of items which need to be bleached between litters.

The following is a list of supplies that will be required when a kitten reaches 4 weeks old and begins weaning off the bottle. Speak to the Foster Care Officer (Kemps Creek carers) or Welfare Officer (branch carers) to see what can be provided by AWL NSW.

Item	Notes
A kitten-proof room	A separate room (with hard floors for the first 2 weeks) will need to be provided for the kittens
Litter Box	A small litter box to teach litter training. A small cardboard box with some litter in can be used initially as standard cat litter trays can be too big for them to easily get in and out of.
Litter	A small layer of recycled paper litter (eg. Breeder's Choice) is to be placed in the litter tray to get the kitten used to the feel and smell of it. Do not use clumping litter or other types as some litter types can be harmful for kittens if ingested.
Bowls/saucers	A low sided bowl/saucer so all the kittens can start to wean and learn to eat by themselves.
Kitten food	During weaning, kittens are generally fed a slurry of milk formula and wet kitten food.
Kitten Shampoo	Kittens may need bathing as they haven't yet learnt how to clean themselves properly.
Towel/Hair dryer	Kittens must be properly dried after being washed to prevent them from becoming ill. If using a hair dryer, ensure the temperature is not too high.
Toys	Kittens are starting to learn how to play and will need access to toys to provide stimulation.

Housing & Bedding

A neonatal kitten will spend the majority of the time asleep, only waking for feeding and toileting. Due to this, it is ideal for them to be kept inside a carrier whilst asleep. The carrier provides protection to the kittens and also allows for easy transport. The carrier will need to have a good collection of blankets and towels to create a nest type home. This will also absorb and remove away any accidental toileting. Once the blankets are placed in the carrier, ensure there are no loose openings where a kitten may become trapped.

A heat source (heat disc or hot water bottle) needs to be placed inside the carrier. Place it to one side to allow the kittens to move away if they are getting too hot. Cover the heat source with a towel to protect the kittens from getting burnt. Check it regularly (every feed) to ensure it is still warm enough and re-heat if required. Keep a blanket over the carrier to help keep the warmth in and to create a safe, dark space to encourage the kittens to sleep.

At 4 weeks, kittens will begin urinating and also regulate heat by themselves, but it is good to provide them with a heat source until about 5 weeks. At 4 weeks, move the kittens out of the carrier and into a larger space to allow them to become litter trained. Provide a cosy spot for the kitten to sleep such as a cardboard box on its side with blankets inside. Ensure the blankets don't have spots where kittens can become trapped.

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Daily Weighing

It is very important to weigh each kitten at the same time every day (eg. every morning before a meal/toileting) from birth until 4 weeks old, then at least 3 times a week from 4-8 weeks. Record the weight and progress of each kitten in the *Neonatal Kitten Monitoring* spreadsheet (or use your own spreadsheet/diary) which can be downloaded from *Foster Care Resources* on the AWL NSW website. If a kitten is not putting on weight or loses weight for 24-48 hours, contact the Kemps Creek Vet Clinic (Kemps Creek foster carers only) or the Welfare Officer (AWL NSW branch carers only), as the kitten may need to see a vet ASAP.

Feeding

The kitten must be warm **before** you feed them otherwise they can get very sick. When held, they should feel warm. If cold, slowly warm them up by placing them in a carrier with blankets and a heat source. Only once they are warm can you begin to feed them.

Neonatal kittens need to be fed special formula (usually Di-Vetelact or Wombaroo). **Do not give cows' milk as this can make them sick.** Also do not give them supermarket kitten milk as they don't usually have the nutrients that Di-Vetelact/Wombaroo have. The formula must be mixed with sterilised water (water that has been boiled then cooled down). The ratio of formula to water is below. Mix well to ensure there are no lumps. Check that the formula is warm (close to room temperature) by dripping some onto your wrist. To warm it up, run it under hot water and to cool it down, put it in the fridge. Mix the formula well prior to checking the temperature to ensure it is consistent. When the bottle is inverted, a small droplet of milk should come out. If nothing comes out, the hole is too small. If the liquid is rushing out, the hole is too big and a new teat will need to be cut. How to cut teats properly: www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJcc1WpUI6w (note: the hole cut and the speed of drips in the video is perfect for a 3 week old kitten but slightly too fast for a 1-2 week old. 1-2 week old kittens should have a slightly smaller hole with a slightly slower drip rate).

Wombaroo Feeding Guide -> Detailed info here: bit.ly/wombarooformula

- To make 30mL of milk: Mix 1 level scoop (6.5g) of powder with 25mL of warm water.
- To make 1 litre of milk: Mix 215g of powder with 850ml of warm water.

Di-Vetelact Feeding Guide:

- Mix 1 level scoop (9g) of Di-Vetelact with 60ml of warm water.
- For 1 Litre: add 15 scoops (135g) of Di-Vetelact to 900mL of warm water.

Milk can be stored in the fridge for up to a day or can be frozen for up to 2 weeks. You can make larger quantities and store it frozen in small portions (e.g. ice cube trays). Discard any unused milk after feeding or any formula left outside the fridge for 2+ hours.

To feed a neonatal kitten, place the kitten on a surface such as a table, counter or your knee if you are sitting down. The kitten **MUST** be in a position which is similar to how they nurse from their mother with their belly's facing downwards. **Never feed a kitten on their back** as

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this can cause it to aspirate (inhales the formula into their respiratory tract rather than swallowing). Aspiration can lead to pneumonia and be fatal. Kittens must be leaning forward or flat on their belly while feeding. Most kittens prefer to have their feet on something while feeding which is why it is suggested to have them on a table. They should be in an almost standing position. You will need to support them with one hand, and with the other hand, hold the bottle. Initially you will need to encourage the kitten to take the teat as this will be an unusual experience and they may not understand that food is in there.

The kitten should soon latch on and they will suckle. **Ensure you keep watching the kitten whilst feeding to ensure that no milk comes out of their noses - this is a sign that they are eating too fast.** If this happens, remove the bottle immediately, wipe away the milk from their nose and slightly tilt them down to help them sneeze the liquid out. After a little break, they can have another go on the bottle. If this keeps occurring, the hole on the teat will need to be smaller or you may need to regularly remove the bottle during feeding so they can swallow and catch their breath.

A kitten will finish suckling on its own. Once this happens they will need to be burped. To burp a kitten, hold them in an upright position and gently rub their back up and down, or give them a gentle pat. You should hear a burp but ensure to watch as they sometimes aren't very loud. Repeat the above with all kittens in the litter. Re-check the temperature of the heat disc/hot water bottle and re-heat if needed. When all the kittens have been fed, toilet them (see below) and then feed again prior to putting them back into the carrier.

The frequency and volume of feeding depends on the age of the kitten, as per below. NOTE: Feeding frequency for un-weaned kittens is as per below, **including throughout the night.**

Age	Average Weight	Feeding Frequency (Hours)	Amount per feed
Newborn	100g	Every 2 Hours	2 – 6ml
1 Week	200g	Every 2-2.5 Hours	6 – 10ml
2 Weeks	300g	Every 3 Hours	10 – 14ml
3 Weeks	400g	Every 4 Hours	14 – 18ml
4 Weeks	500g	Every 6 Hours (begin weaning)	18ml – 22ml
5 Weeks	600g	Weaned	-

Weaning

At 4-4.5 weeks (ideally not earlier or later) begin to wean the kittens with these steps:

1. Instead of feeding from a bottle, put the (slightly warm) formula on a spoon and offer it to the kitten. When the kitten is licking the formula comfortably from the spoon, slowly lower the spoon into a flat saucer (plate) containing more formula. After several tries, the kitten should start to get used to it and they should begin lapping the milk directly from the saucer. Offer from a spoon/saucer first and then top them up with the bottle whilst they're still learning.

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2. Mix a small amount of wet (mousse type) kitten food with the formula and repeat step 1 (if kitten is happily lapping from the saucer, skip the spoon feeding). Mix well initially! Gradually add slightly more wet food each day until the kitten is eating only wet food without the formula. By 5 weeks, they should be eating wet food by themselves (without the formula). Ensure that they have access to water at all times.

During weaning, place a puppy pad under the saucer as the process can be very messy! If any kittens are struggling to become weaned or are not weaned by 6 weeks of age, please contact your Foster Mentor (Kemps Creek carers only) or the Welfare Officer (branch foster carers only) for further advice.

Toileting

A neonatal kitten is unable to toilet by themselves and requires stimulation to go to the toilet. The kitten should be stimulated with each feed. There is no particular position in which the kitten needs to be in to toilet. Some prefer to do it with the stomach facing down whilst others prefer to turn them over so their stomach is facing up. With one hand, hold the kitten securely and with the other hand, use a warm damp cotton pad or soft tissue and begin to gently wipe from the belly down to their private parts, repeat this motion for approx. 45 seconds. Kittens will usually start to urinate after 10 seconds of rubbing. Do not over-rub the area as this can irritate the skin. Make a note of the colour of the urine. During this process, you may notice the kitten starts to push, this is a sign that they have a poo brewing. Continue stimulating the bottom area until they are finished passing the stool. Ensure you make a note of how often they are defecating and the colour and consistency. A kitten should defecate between 1 to 4 times a day. If they have not toileted for 24 hours, place (only) their bottoms in lukewarm water and try to stimulate. If a kitten has not defecated for 48 hours, contact the AWL NSW vet clinic (Kemps Creek foster carers only) or the Welfare Officer (branch foster carers only). Once they have finished their business, give the area a wipe over with a clean pad to remove any urine from their fur.

For urine, you want to have a pale yellow colour as this will show that the kitten is well hydrated. If the urine is a dark yellow or unusual colour, contact the AWL NSW vet clinic ASAP (Kemps Creek foster carers only) or the Welfare Officer (AWL NSW branch foster carers only) as this is a sign of severe dehydration and fluids may need to be administered.

Tip: When a kitten gets to 3-4 weeks of age, after feeding try stimulating them in a litter tray, ensuring that their urine goes onto the litter so they can smell it. Place them down in the litter tray once completed and allow them to walk around and climb out by themselves.

Cleaning

It is important to ensure that neonatal kittens are kept clean as they are unable to clean themselves. Generally they will be pretty clean as they sleep the majority of the time, but as they become older they can accidentally toilet on littermates. When they are young, try to avoid giving a full bath and instead use damp cotton pads with warm water to wipe them

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down. Ensure they are dry prior to being placed back into the carrier. A clean toothbrush can also be used to gently brush the kitten as this is similar to a mother cats tongue.

At 4 weeks of age, kittens will be starting the weaning process and toileting by themselves - this is when things get messy! It is important that any residual food or urine is removed from the kittens to prevent burning to the skin, after eating and toileting. Try to wipe down the kitten as per above but if the kitten is really dirty, follow the steps below.

Kittens are to be washed in lukewarm water - fill up a sink or bowl and dip your elbow in to ensure it is a comfortable temperature. Ensure the kitten is supported the whole time they are around water, keeping their head above the water at all times. For any stubborn food or poop clumps, soak the area and use a swab to try and ease it off. Do not try to pull off anything in dry form as this can hurt the kitten and make them fearful of bath-time. A small amount of Aloveen shampoo can be used, ensuring that it is kept clear from the eyes and mouth. Limit the time spent bathing the kitten so they don't become too cold. Once finished, ensure the kitten is completely dry prior to being put back in bed. A hair dryer can be used, ensuring that the temperature is not too high. This is the perfect time to change all the bedding, and ensure the heat source is nice and warm. Place the clean kitten in the clean bed next to the heat source.

Medical

Kittens need to be medicated more often than adult cats when it comes to parasite control. From 2 weeks of age, a kitten should be wormed every two weeks and given monthly flea prevention. From 4 weeks, the kitten should get their first vaccination, with a booster vaccination every 4 weeks until 16 weeks.

Regularly monitor for signs of illness or infection, losing weight and also check for eye or nose discharge or any other issues.

**The information in this guide has been adapted from AWL NSW staff and volunteers, Best Friends Society and NYC Feral Cat.*