

Found Kittens?

If you find newborn baby kittens, *please* resist the urge to pick them up and bring them in, unless they're in imminent danger (rising flood waters, etc.). **They are probably not abandoned or orphaned.**

Mama cats *have* to leave their babies from time to time to search for food for themselves, relieve themselves, or just take a break and have some quiet time. **They may be gone up to 8 hours, but are usually not far.** If you only see one or two kittens, it's possible the mama cat is in the process of moving her kittens.

If they look "safe" leave them alone, and allow the mom to care for them. She knows how to do this better than any humans do. Monitor the area, checking every few hours. Approach quietly and cautiously. If mama is near, and she feels that you are a threat to her babies, she will move them. Usually the first place she chose for them is the safest one for her little ones. If you handle them, or make a pest of yourself, she'll be forced to move them to another location that may not be quite as safe.

Put **fresh, cool water, and food nearby** for the mama, slightly out of the line of sight, so that if you attract other hungry kitties, you aren't drawing attention to the babies. Mama cats need extra calories, so give her kitten food, both dry and wet. A box with some clean, soft towels nearby may encourage her to use it as a bed for herself and her wee ones.

If the mama cat returns, do not continue to visit or check on the kittens more than once or twice each day. Continue to provide food and fresh water for the mama, so that she doesn't have to go too far in search of food.

If the mom cat is friendly, and will allow you to pet her, put her babies in a carrier, and coax her in. Secure the door and bring them all inside to a guest room closet, bathroom, or study. Provide a nice soft bed for mama and kittens, another bed for mama away from the kittens, clean litter box with non-clumping litter, fresh cool water, and food. If mama is healthy, she'll generally care for the kittens without the need for human intervention. Care for mama cat, and she'll care for her kittens. If something appears amiss, review the instructions below to supplement care for the kittens. Consult a veterinarian immediately if kittens or mama show any signs of illness, injury, or distress. Change the bedding daily, and keep it clean and dry.

Removing the kittens:

If the kittens are looking distressed, they're meowing loudly, they are breathing with their mouths open, they look too hot or too cold, they need your help. Sometimes the mama cat is killed by a predator, or hit by a car, while out searching for food.

Once you remove the babies, **you must keep them at an appropriate body temperature.** Using a box with clean, soft towels, make a nest and place the kittens in the box. Cover them loosely with more towels. Keep them away from drafts and out of humidity. They need a room that stays close to 90 degrees for the first two weeks of age, then lower 80's.

If the kittens are too warm, or dehydrated, their gums, lips, and tongue may be bright red, and their mouths will be dry and sticky. They may be panting. The skin will lack elasticity. Wet a wash cloth in cold water or ice water, wring it out, and place it in a Ziploc bag. Put it near the kittens, but don't put them directly on the bag. A few drops of cool water or Pedialyte in the mouth may help, but do not feed until they have returned to the proper body temperature. You may offer a few more drops of Pedialyte or water in the mouth, up to 1 mL (1 cc). This can be repeated every half hour until the body temperature has returned to normal. If any fluid bubbles out of the nostrils, STOP and seek immediate vet attention.

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If they are too cold, they will be listless, and feel cool to the touch. Place them next to your skin, under your clothing until you get them inside. Using a wash cloth, gently rub them to stimulate circulation. You can use a hot water bottle under the towels, or a heating pad set to **LOW**. Place it on one side of the box, and never place the kittens directly on the heat source. If the kittens get too warm, they need to be able to crawl off the heated towels and find a cooler spot. A shampoo bottle filled with hot water, then wrapped in a towel, can be placed next to a kitten, as long as it is able to crawl away from it if it gets too warm. Monitor the heat and the kittens closely. They should be warmed gradually, over the course of a couple of hours. Do not leave them unattended with an electrical heat source. Do not feed until the body temperature has returned to normal.

If the body temperature is changed too rapidly, it may result in death.

If the kittens have not eaten, they may show **signs of low blood sugar**. These include muscle twitching, lethargy, and sometimes convulsions. Place a few drops of corn syrup (Karo) on the gums or tongue. Do not feed the kittens until the body temperature is normal. Seek immediate vet attention.

If the kittens need to be washed, use a warm moist cloth and gently wipe only the sections of the body that are soiled. Use short strokes to simulate the mother's licking. **Do not submerge the kittens in water**. After they've been cleaned, dry them with a hair dryer set to **LOW**, and a warmed dry towel.

DO NOT FEED COW'S MILK. Milk replacement (kitten formula) and nursing kits can be purchased at pet supply stores. Follow the instructions on the packaging for cleaning and preparing the bottles and nipples, and for the appropriate mixing ratio of the milk replacement. Do not heat the liquid directly, rather place the bottle in a pan of hot water to warm it, and test on your own wrist or inside the elbow. Wash your hands before and after handling the formula and feeding the kittens. **Do not feed kittens on their backs**. Place them on their stomachs and gently lift their chins. Rub the nipple back and forth across the lips and gums until the kitten begins to taste the formula and latches on. Remember to tilt the bottle up so that the kitten is not sucking in air. An eye dropper may be necessary for the first week or two. Every third feeding, offer some water in the bottle to start. Kittens will usually stop suckling when they are full. **Do not feed too fast or force the formula**.

Kittens eating formula **need to be burped**. Keeping them on their stomachs, either on your lap or on your shoulder, gently pat their backs.

Until the kittens can urinate and defecate on their own (about 3 weeks of age), they **must be stimulated to relieve themselves**. Wet a cotton ball with warm water, and gently rub the anal and genital area. They will begin to go within 1-2 minutes. It's very important to do this after each meal. The urine should be a pale yellow or clear. If it is darker, the kitten may need more formula. The stool should be a pale to dark brown and partially formed. Too firm of a stool indicates dehydration or not enough formula. If the kitten needs more formula, increase the number of feedings rather than the amount at each meal. Too much food causes bloating, gas, regurgitation, and sometimes aspiration into the lungs. Diarrhea can be the result of a change in diet, too much formula, or an intestinal parasite. Green stool indicates an infection. We do not advocate medicating or treating animals for parasites (deworming, or giving antibiotics) without a diagnosis and veterinary instruction. If you suspect an intestinal condition, seek veterinary attention. Kittens can become dehydrated or septic very quickly, and the condition can lead to death.

Remember to clean their faces and rear ends after each feeding.

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Stages of Development and Care:

The first 24-48 hours of life: The umbilical cord is still attached, eyes are completely shut, ears are folded down. There are no teeth. They have a thin coat of silky fur and the tail is a teeny stub. Kittens are immobile. They will make some noises and may purr. Keep the kittens out of drafts and humidity. The temperature in the room should be 90 degrees if there is no mama. If you have the mama too, then 80 degrees is sufficient. Feed 1 mL formula every 1-2 hours by bottle or eye dropper, increasing by .5 mL each day. Burp, stimulate, and clean, as described above, after each feeding.

Day 3 to 14: The umbilical cord will fall off usually around Day 4. Eyes begin to open between 7 – 10 days, ears begin to unfold. Kittens begin to crawl and snuggle and knead. The room temperature should still be around 90 degrees. A kitten's weight should double within the first 14 days of life. Kittens should be weighed daily or every other day for the first two weeks of life. Failure of weight gain is often the first sign of illness in kittens. Feed every 2 hours, even during the night. Each day, increase by .5 mL (Day 3: 2 mL per feeding, Day 4: 2.5 mL, ... Day 14: 7-9 mL per feeding). If the kitten wants more, allow it to eat more. Remember, they will usually stop when they're full. It's important not to let them become malnourished. Burp, stimulate, and clean, as described above, after each feeding.

Days 15-21: Eyes should be completely open and are able to focus. They are still blue. The kittens will start to respond to noises and movement. The first wobbly steps are taken. As the kittens age the fur develops and becomes thicker and longer. Room temperature can be in the lower 80's, as long as they are free from drafts, kept dry, and have warm places to snuggle into. If the mama cat is with the kittens, normal household temperature is fine, as long as it's not less than 75 degrees. Feed every 3-4 hours, yes, during the night. They should be consuming 10 mL formula per feeding by the end of the third week. Burp, stimulate, and clean, as described above, after each feeding.

Three weeks old: Ears are unfolded and up. The front teeth begin to come in, and the kittens are starting to toddle around. The tail is thick but still pretty short. They begin to carry it straight up to aid with balance. The kittens weigh approximately 12 oz. Feed 4-6 times per day. Begin to introduce some solids, but continue to provide formula from a bottle. Prepare a gruel of Royal Canin Baby Cat 34 (for the first 4 months of life, teeniest little round kibble, no sharp edges to choke on), with the formula, a little smooth kitten canned food, and plain yogurt. In the beginning, it should be just slightly thicker than the formula itself, so that it can be offered in a bottle. Decrease the amount of formula used in the gruel every 3-4 days, to allow it to become thicker, and begin offering a little in a shallow dish. Water should be available in a shallow dish, at least part of the day, and given by bottle on occasion if necessary. Kittens at this age will toddle and crawl right across a dish, and must be cleaned after mealtime. They still need to be kept dry and warm. A shallow pan or box should be placed nearby with a small amount of **non-clumping** litter. If you see a kitten starting to scratch around on the bedding, then squat to potty, gently pick him up and place him in the litter pan. No scolding! He will learn by repetition. Burping and stimulation are no longer necessary, but they still need to be cleaned.

Four weeks old: The canine teeth begin to erupt. They are stable on their feet, and they can use the litter box by themselves. Weight 16 oz (1 lb.). They will be able to lap up formula from a dish, and eat soft food. You can begin to mix low-sodium chicken broth with the dry kibble, just to moisten it, and decrease the amount of formula. Provide a shallow dish of water. This is the most exciting age! Full of change, full of wonder (and wander) and awe. Remember to keep the kittens clean.

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Five weeks old: The lower back teeth should be starting to come in. The eyes change from blue to blue/gray. They run, play, and pounce. If you see kittens running around a yard, they are at least 5-6 weeks old. Kittens at this age will groom themselves and each other. Weight 20 oz. The kittens are able to eat on their own, and you no longer need to moisten their kibble. Continue to provide dry food, canned food, and water. Formula can be offered on the side, but shouldn't be the mainstay. A bottle is no longer necessary, as they'll likely be biting chunks off the nipple by this age. Kittens usually will eat what they most need.

Six weeks old: The eyes are beginning to change from blue/gray to their final color, usually a shade of yellow or green between 6 1/2 to 7 weeks of age. The tail resembles an adult cat's tail in relative length. Weight 1.5 lbs (24 oz.)

Eight weeks old: Upper molars erupt, and all baby teeth should now be present. Kittens look like little versions of full grown cats. At this age, if they have not had human contact, they are well on their way to becoming feral. Taming is still achievable, but wait no longer to bring them in and socialize them. Weight 2 lbs.

Four months old: Baby teeth can begin to fall out as early as 11 to 12 weeks of age, and the adult teeth will begin to erupt. The front teeth are usually in between 3-1/2 to 4 months (14-16 weeks). The outer incisors (between the front teeth and the canines) are present at 4 to 4-1/2 months (16-18 weeks). Adult food can be introduced, but it never hurts to provide kitten food up to 10 months, unless they are becoming overweight.

Five months old: Adult canines are usually in by 5 months.

Six months old: Upper and lower molars arrive between 5 and 6 months of age.

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ALF Animal Loving Friends

7650 S McClintock Dr
Suite 103-120
Tempe, AZ 85284

ALF.Petfinder.com

www.facebook.com/alfrescue

Email: alfrescue@hotmail.com