



## Willamette Humane Society – Bottle Baby Program – Fostering Overview

**The #1 thing to remember when fostering kittens is: WEIGH, WEIGH, WEIGH!!!** The overwhelming majority of kittens who pass away in foster care do so because they were not weighed as frequently as they should have been!

### WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU GET YOUR KITTENS HOME:

- Get your kittens settled into their **habitat**. Make sure they have a **heat source!**
- Be sure to kitten-proof their area and watch out for any **common household hazards**.
- **Feed and care** for your kittens as instructed, referring back to the Feeding/Care Guide.
- **Record** their weights and make notes about progress on the Daily Care Sheet.
- Spend time **playing** with your kittens and **socializing them**, if they're old enough!
- Give kittens plenty of time to **rest**. They will sleep much of the day – this is normal.

All kittens are born with closed eyes and closed ear canals. They can neither see nor hear during the first few days of life. Kittens find their way to a mother's nipple by sense of smell and tactile sensations. The ear canals will begin to open at 5-8 days of life. Eyes begin to open at 8 days and are completely open at 14 days. All kittens are born with blue eyes, and their true eye color appears when they are about 3 weeks old. This information can help you determine the approximate age of a kitten.

The greatest single danger to abandoned kittens is chilling. A kitten separated from its mother will not live long. Prolonged exposure to cold results in a drop of body temperature, and, if it drops below the blood sugar level, the kitten's internal organs begin a systematic shutdown. If you find abandoned kittens and they feel cold to the touch, hypothermia has set in, and the kitten's condition is critical. Please follow the **Fading Kitten Protocol** in this situation.

**WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?** You may contact either your Foster Mentor or the Foster & Rescue Manager at [foster@whs4pets.org](mailto:foster@whs4pets.org).

**NON-URGENT MEDICAL:** If your kittens start to show **any** signs of mild-moderate illness – *sneezing, vomiting, mild-moderate diarrhea, not eating, runny nose, goopy eyes, hair loss, going outside litterbox, moderate weight loss (10 grams or less), fleas, etc.* – **contact the Foster & Rescue Manager via email at: [foster@whs4pets.org](mailto:foster@whs4pets.org).**

**Be sure to include:** the kittens' A#s, current weights, and a description of their symptoms. Use a descriptive subject! (example: "Bella A12345678 has diarrhea" or "Seinfeld kittens have fleas")

We encourage you to download the **Maddie's Fund Pet Assistant** app on your smartphone to contact us and to upload photos of your foster kittens!

**!!!\*\* FOR MEDICAL EMERGENCIES CALL THE WHS EMERGENCY NUMBER\*\*!!!**  
**(503) 585-5900, ext. 333**

For kittens, a medical emergency includes head slumped/ body limp/ unable to rouse (**Fading Kitten Syndrome**), **diarrhea** that is very liquidy, white, bloody, or black, any **rapid weight loss, mouth breathing, heavy/labored breathing, red/brown urine, vomiting and diarrhea** together or within a short timeframe, **seizures**. Any injuries sustained while in foster care also warrant a call to the emergency number!

## Bottle Baby Foster Program – Feeding Guidelines

We divide kittens into 3 categories for fostering:

Feeding stage:	Age range:	Weight range:	Feeding frequency:
Bottle babies	0 to ~ 4 weeks	90 to 400 grams	Every 2-3 hours
Syringe gruel	3 to ~ 6 weeks	300 to 700 grams	Every 4-6 hours
Gruel/kibble	5 weeks and up	700 grams and up	Every 4-6 hours

The most important thing to remember when caring for kittens is to **WEIGH, WEIGH, WEIGH!** The *vast majority* of kittens who pass away in foster care do so *because they were not weighed as consistently as we require.*

Making sure your kittens are getting enough to eat is your most important duty as a foster! Below are in-depth instructions on how to feed kittens according to their age and size, as well as info on issues to look out for during each stage of your kittens' growth. **Please make sure you keep an eye on your kittens' stools!**



## Bottle Babies

### How to make formula:

Feed PetAg KMR® powdered formula from bottle and/or oral syringe. Mix 2 parts water to 1 part powdered formula (unless otherwise advised). Shake well to dissolve lumps! Store mixed formula in the fridge up to 48 hours.

All kittens must eat **5% of their body weight** at each feeding. All kittens **must be weighed** before and after feeding!

### Feeding instructions:

- Formula should be fed warm, preferably with kitten wrapped up in towel or blanket.
- Feed kitten upright or on belly in a **prone** position, **NOT** on his/her back like a human infant! If you hold the kitten upright, be sure you hold it vertically and not leaning backward!
- Gather kittens' feeding charts, some warm towels, and some paper towels.
- If you have a kitten bottle feeding kit, bottle feed the kitten first. Some kittens take a while to latch on, so be patient! If kitten does not gain its 5% via the bottle, proceed w/ syringe feeding. **Only use 1mL syringe.**
- Watch for formula coming out of kitten's nose or a rasping "wet" cough. This is called **aspiration** – it means the kitten has ingested formula into her lungs and is in danger of "drowning." If one of your kittens is aspirating, **stop feeding** and hold the kitten upside to help clear her nose of fluid. Once no more formula is coming out of kitten's nose, **continue feeding.**
- Weigh kitten periodically throughout feeding process – the kitten is only done eating when she has gained her 5%.
- Thoroughly clean off any formula on kitten's fur with a paper towel and dry kitten off. (Formula will stick and is very hard to remove if it dries and is also painful for the kitten!)
- Weigh and record after-food weight!
- Kittens under 4 weeks must be stimulated in order to go to the bathroom after each feeding. Usually a mother cat would lick her kittens, but orphaned kittens need your help! After each meal, **stimulate kitten** w/ cotton ball or non-alcoholic baby wipe to help with urine/stool bowel movement. It is best to do this over a trashcan in case the kitten has to pee a lot! The kitten will not always have to go, but it is *crucial* that this step is performed after every feeding. *Failure to stimulate orphan kittens can lead to serious illness and/or death.* You can view a short video demonstrating stimulation at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KExOXnZHt50>.
- If your kitten appears restless and cries excessively, check to make sure it is getting enough food, as this is a sign of being underfed and can also lead to dehydration and death.
- **Fleas** on a very small kitten can cause anemia. First, pick fleas off with a flea comb and drown them in a soapy water solution. For a bad infestation, you can bathe the kitten in warm soapy water (Dawn liquid dish detergent is recommended). Avoid the eye area, use a washcloth around the face, and rinse the kitten thoroughly. **Do not** use flea shampoo or topical flea treatments on kittens 6 weeks or under! Dry the kitten thoroughly using a warm towel and if needed a hair dryer on the **low** setting, then place on a towel-covered heating pad. **Remember that WARMTH is essential for tiny kittens!!!** Be sure to contact the Foster & Rescue Manager so that we can prescribe medication as appropriate.

## Syringe Gruel Babies

**Bottle babies should be switched to syringe gruel when they reach 3.5-4 weeks old** (when their canine teeth begin to grow in). Instead of KMR, kittens will now eat canned kitten food mixed with water and blended to a smooth paste.

It is important to note that the syringe gruel phase is, essentially, nothing more than a layover between nursing (formula or mama's milk) and weaning (eating independently). At this stage, you should make sure your kittens always have access to kibble, gruel (canned food with water), and a **bowl of water**, as eventually they will decide to go it on their own!

Until that magical day, however, you will need to step in! Remember that just because you see your kittens eating on their own, this does not mean they're eating *enough* independently to maintain their health. Too often, fosters assume that because they've witnessed their kittens eating kibble or gruel from a bowl, those kittens don't need to be syringe fed anymore. ***This is not the case – and failure to follow the steps outlined above can lead to serious illness and/or death of kittens.***

### How to make syringe gruel:

You will need a **blender or bullet-type blender**. Blend approximately one can of food with 1/2 can water (double, triple, etc. as needed). Your syringe gruel should be approximately the consistency of a milkshake, and you should be able to easily draw it up into a syringe.

**Again, kittens must eat 5% of their body weight at each feeding. Kittens must be weighed before and after feeding!**

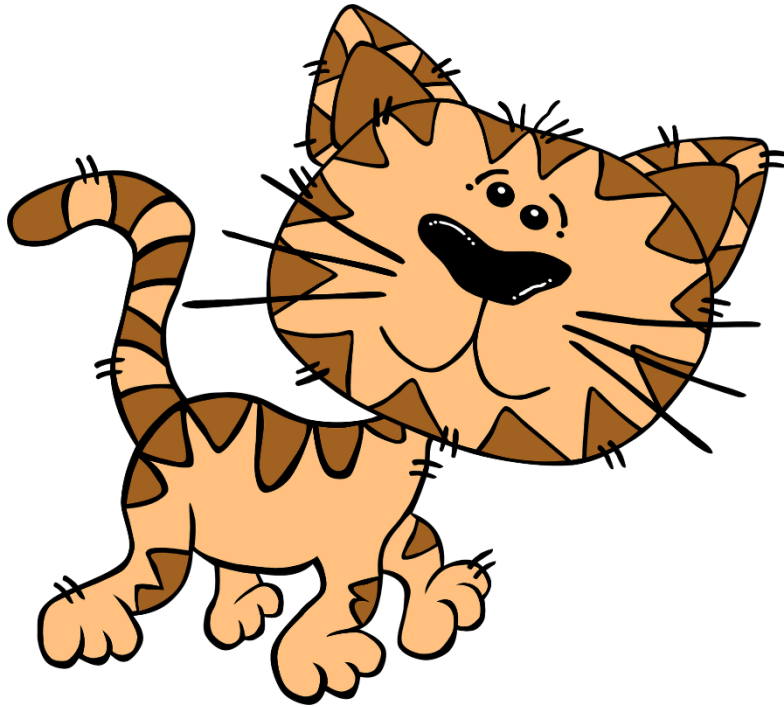
### Feeding instructions:

- First, give your kitten the opportunity to eat independently! Offer kitten warmed up gruel and kibble in separate plates or shallow bowls. If kitten shows no interest after a while, proceed with syringe feeding.
- With syringe in your dominant hand, use your non-dominant index finger and thumb to grip the kitten's head at her temples. Tilt kitten's head back at about a 45° angle, using your palm to gently force kitten into a seated position.
- Draw warmed syringe gruel (microwave to a bit above lukewarm temperature – no more than 5-10 seconds) into 10mL syringe.
- Insert syringe into **side** of kitten's mouth. *Do not put syringe directly in front of kitten's mouth* (even if she tries to position herself this way!), as kitten could very easily choke.
- Slowly plunge syringe gruel into kitten's mouth, removing the syringe every few seconds to allow her to swallow.
- Weigh kitten periodically throughout feeding process – the kitten is only done eating when she has gained her 5%!
- Always thoroughly clean off any gruel on the kitten's fur. Dry kitten off well.

## Gruel Babies

This is the last stage of kitten rearing – rejoice! When your kittens begin eating enough gruel and kibble on their own to **gain weight consistently every day**, you're well on your way to throwing those syringes out! Don't get too excited yet, though – your kittens will still need to be syringe fed if they're not able to eat 5% of their body weight on their own. The switch from syringe gruel/kibble is not a magical "aha!" moment on your kitten's part – it's a process you'll both need to work through very thoughtfully!

Once you see that your kittens are gaining around 5% of their bodyweight on a daily basis for at least 5 days, you can begin to weigh them twice a day instead of every time they eat. **NEVER go more than 24 hours without weighing your kittens – weight loss is the number one reason kittens pass away in foster care!**



## Willamette Humane Society Bottle Baby Program – Caring for Neonatal Kittens

**\*\*\*The two most important rules of Kitten Club:** Kittens must be **WARM** and have **FULL BELLIES** at all times!\*\*\*

### The Basics

- Kittens must be kept in a safe and secure spot and isolated from other pets (to prevent illness) for 7-10 days.
- Kittens must have access to a **heating pad (on low setting) at all times.**
- Do not give kittens baths unless absolutely necessary. If kittens get wet, they must be blow-dried until they are completely dry. Young kittens can very easily become hypothermic. As an alternative, use a hypoallergenic baby wipe to clean dirty kittens.
- You are required to keep track of kittens' weights, bowel movements, medications, and other health issues on your Daily Care Sheets.

For any questions or concerns about your kittens' weights or general development, please contact the Foster & Rescue Manager at [foster@whs4pets.org](mailto:foster@whs4pets.org).

### Kitten Developmental Milestones

- Kittens typically weigh about 80-100 grams at birth; they should gain about 100g/week.
- Eyes open at 7-10 days (eyes will be blue until kittens are 6-7 weeks old).
- At about 2 weeks, they will start crawling around (can inch around as early as 4 days).
- At 3-4 weeks, they'll start to play with each other. The ears will start to stand up, and teeth will begin to come in.
- At 3-5 weeks, it's time to start the weaning process – kittens should be well on their way to eating independently and using the litter box. At 4 weeks kittens will receive their first deworming and vaccination.
- At 6 weeks, kittens receive second deworming and FVRCP.
- At 8 weeks & up, kittens should be big enough for spay/neuter and will receive further booster vaccinations and deworming as needed. Then they're on their way to their forever homes!

### Setting up a Habitat

For Bottle Babies: Any medium-sized bin, tub, crate, or carrier that measures around 20"x15"x15" (the size of a regular cat carrier) makes a great habitat for unweaned kittens. Something that's easy to clean is usually best (like a Rubbermaid storage bin). Place a heating pad (set on low) or snuggle disc flat on one side of the containment area, and make sure there is room for kittens to move off the heat source if they get too warm. Cover the bottom of the containment area with a blanket or towel. Feel free to place stuffed toys and plenty of soft fleecy things in the habitat for kittens to snuggle with.

For Syringe Gruel & Gruel Babies: Once kittens are able to crawl out of their bin or ready to use a litter box, you can move them to a bigger space. Bathtubs are often great for this stage. Keep the heat source available at all times, but still make sure that the kittens can move off of it. Place a small bowl of kibble, a saucer of gruel, and a stable, flat-bottomed cup of water in an accessible spot, away from their bedding. Fill a very shallow litter box (a baking tin or canned cat food cardboard flat is fine) with non-clumping litter and place it in an accessible spot away from the food dishes. At this point, the kittens will also want to play with toys! Feel free to give them plenty of plush dolls, balls, bells, etc. Just make sure there's nothing they could accidentally swallow or get tangled up in!

For Kittens Age 6 Weeks and Up: At this age, kittens will likely begin door-dashing and trying to escape whatever enclosure they're confined to. If you would like to give them free run of your home, please do so with extreme caution. Kittens can and will get into everything. Never leave them unsupervised, particularly when there are other pets and/or roommates where you live! Also, remember that the more space they have, the less likely they are to find their litter box!

Most importantly, especially once they are over ~4 weeks old, make sure you socialize your kittens as often as possible! This is crucial to their development – they need to learn to love humans! Introduce them to friends, children, other cats, friendly dogs, etc., but **always** make sure they're in a controlled environment and being closely supervised.

## **Common Household Hazards for Kittens**

Even the most experienced fosters sometimes overlook household hazards. The following is a list of things that we have seen cause injury to kittens.

- **Rocking chairs** – keep out of the kittens' area
- **Reclining chairs** – kittens can easily crawl inside
- **Toilets** – keep lids closed at all times
- **Bathtubs** – keep water drained at all times
- **Doors** – make sure that kittens are not behind doors that are being opened
- **Exits** – keep unscreened doors and windows closed at all times when not in use
- **Outdoors** – do NOT allow kittens to go outside. NO EXCEPTIONS!
- **Other cats** – can sometimes be asymptomatic carriers of viruses that are more harmful to kittens, or can be too aggressive with kittens
- **Dogs** – all dogs (but especially large dogs) can easily injure a kitten, often accidentally
- **Washers and dryers** – kittens can crawl inside of the machines unnoticed or get stuck behind them
- **Other appliances** – make sure that kittens cannot crawl behind or under refrigerators, ovens, etc.
- **Holes** – make sure any holes in drywall or cabinetry are plugged or blocked
- **Small objects** – rubber bands, strings, paper clips, and other small objects can be accidentally ingested
- **Chemicals** – make sure they are put away
- **House plants** – many are poisonous to cats – make sure they are out of reach
- **Electrical cords** – can be sprayed with bitter apple, covered with tape or “cord covers” to prevent chewing

In the unfortunate event that one of your kittens has died, for any reason, please **contact us right away**. Please do not be embarrassed or afraid to reach out – these things happen. Kittens are fragile creatures, and unfortunately, some of them are just not equipped to make it in this world.

**If a kitten has passed away**, please email [foster@whs4pets.org](mailto:foster@whs4pets.org) immediately. CC your Foster Mentor. Describe what happened. Label a plastic baggie with kitten's name and A#. Wrap the kitten in a towel and place the kitten inside the baggie. Place in freezer and wait for further instructions.

## Fading Kitten Syndrome

You are **not** receiving this handout because Fading Kitten Syndrome is a common occurrence, but rather because if you ever encounter this condition, YOU will need to take action IMMEDIATELY. The worst thing you can do for a fading kitten is to take him/her to your vet – most kittens will not survive the car ride. YOU are this kitten's best chance at making it.



Fading Kitten Syndrome is a life-threatening emergency in which a kitten “crashes” and begins to fade away. Kittens under 3 weeks old and/or kittens who are or were recently sick are most susceptible to FKS. Oftentimes, it occurs in kittens who have been eating poorly and losing, or not gaining, weight. This is why it is **VITAL** that you weigh your kittens every time they're fed. *Although it is rare, FKS can also occur in healthy kittens at any age.*

### Symptoms of FKS:

- Extreme lethargy – unable to stand or hold head up, not responding when touched
- Body feels cool or cold to the touch (not just insides of ears – all over)
- Panting or gasping for breath
- Meowing/crying out in distress

**If you see these symptoms, it is crucial that you take the following steps NOW:**

### Step 1: GET KITTEN WARM

Grab your heating pad\* and a towel. Immediately wrap the kitten up in the towel like a “burrito,” leaving only the kitten's face exposed. Wrap the heating pad (turned on **low**) around the towel as an extra source of heat. Do not remove the kitten from the burrito even if he/she struggles and cries to get out!

\*If you don't have a heating pad, you can either: a) Keep your dryer running full of towels. Grab a new hot one every 5 minutes and wrap it around the “burrito” towel. After 5 minutes, trade that towel out for a new one. Don't remove the “burrito” towel. b) Fill 2 socks full of rice and tie the ends so the rice doesn't spill out. Throw them in the microwave for 3 minutes. Keep them next to the kitten on the outside of the “burrito” towel. Every 30 minutes, reheat one sock and leave the other next to the kitten so she doesn't cool off.

### Step 2: GET KITTEN'S BLOOD SUGAR UP

Grab a small bowl and fill it with either corn syrup (Karo, etc.) or sugar water. The higher the sugar content, the better. Make sure you have your syringe handy. Warm the contents up in the microwave for a few seconds until the liquid is a bit above room temperature. You will administer this sugar water (with the syringe) to the kitten while he/she is in the burrito. **Give the kitten 1 drop every 3 minutes.**

**Step 3: CALL THE WHS EMERGENCY NUMBER @ (503) 585-5900, ext. 333**



## Prognosis

We generally have a good success rate with these kittens if you follow the above steps! The process can take hours, so be prepared to administer the steps outlined above for anywhere from one to three to even five hours.

### **We DO NOT recommend you rush your foster kitten to the vet for many reasons:**

You have the motivation to sit right there with them and make them your top priority. A vet clinic has multiple patients who need help and won't be able to give your kitten the 100% undivided attention you can give them.

Your kitten will continue to be cold/hypoglycemic on the way to the vet, in the waiting room, and in the hospital while they try to determine what is wrong, etc. Most kittens won't last long enough for them to begin treatment.

These protocols were created by a veterinarian based on what would be done if she saw these patients in her clinic. Most clinics would do the same thing – try to keep the kitten warm and get their blood sugar up. There isn't much else you can do.

Keep in mind that it can sometimes take hours for them to come out of this state and start acting normally again. Don't give up! Once they do come out of it, make sure you contact the Foster & Rescue Manager to discuss what could have possibly caused them to fade in the first place, and make sure we have the kitten on all the right medical treatments for any illnesses they have that may have caused it.

Unfortunately, even if you've employed all of the steps outlined above to a tee, some kittens just won't make it. Cats get pregnant very easily and have a LOT of kittens, specifically because they are so fragile. If a kitten passes in your care, don't blame yourself – these kittens would have had about a 0% chance of surviving if it weren't for you. Send us an email if your kitten has passed and focus on taking the best care of his/her littermates.



## Willamette Humane Society Sanitation Protocols

It is important to sanitize your fostering room between litters of kittens. Please follow these steps:

1. Begin by removing all bedding, food/water bowls, litter boxes, and toys.
2. Using a weak bleach solution (1 part bleach to 32 parts cold water or 1 ounce bleach to 1 quart of cold water), scrub all surfaces within kittens' reach.
3. Food and water bowls can be washed in the dishwasher.
4. Litter boxes (except cardboard, which is disposable) and reusable toys should be cleaned with the bleach solution.
5. All bedding needs to be washed using bleach and hot water.
6. Any toys or items made with non-cleanable material should be thrown away.



## Willamette Humane Society Bottle Baby Program – Supplies Needed



### Bottle Babies: Required Supplies

- Bottle kit with nipples OR 1mL syringes
- Powdered KMR formula
- Electric heating pad that **DOES NOT** shut off automatically
- Secure pet carrier for transportation
- Digital scale (food or postal) that weighs in grams
- Non-alcoholic baby wipes or cotton balls/pads

### Gruel/Syringe Babies: Required Supplies

- Electric heating pad that **DOES NOT** shut off automatically
- High quality canned kitten food (we will provide you a few cans to start with)
- Hard kitten food (kibble) – Royal Canin Mother & Babycat
- Secure pet carrier for transportation
- Empty room/bathroom to isolate kittens
- Digital scale (food or postal) that weighs in grams
- Shallow litter box & non-clumping litter
- Blender or food processor (*syringe gruel only*)

### Gruel/Syringe Babies: Optional Supplies

- Human baby food (chicken or turkey with **no** onions, garlic, or spices)
- Nutri-Cal – nutritional supplement for weight gain

### Pregnant/Nursing Mom: Required Supplies

- High quality canned kitten food for mom and to wean babies
- Hard kitten food for mom and to wean babies – Royal Canin Mother & Babycat
- Bottle kit with nipples OR 1mL syringes
- Powdered KMR formula in case kittens need supplementary feeding
- Electric heating pad that **DOES NOT** shut off automatically
- Empty room/bathroom to isolate mom and kittens
- Digital scale (food or postal) that weighs in grams
- Litter box & non-clumping litter
- Secure pet carrier for transportation

**We Will Provide:** Feeding syringes, a rice sock or snuggle disc for transportation, KMR/canned food/kibble as available, feeding charts, digital scales as available, informational handouts, and all necessary medications and treatments.

## Willamette Humane Society Bottle Baby Program – Food Recommendations

Kittens age 0-4 weeks		<p><b>BB Formula:</b> PetAg KMR® powder formula mixed 2:1 (2 parts water to 1 part powder). Serve warm.</p> <p>Each kitten should take in 5cc (or 5 grams) for every 100 grams of body weight <b>at every feeding.</b></p>
Kittens age 3-8 weeks (once canine teeth have begun to come in)		<p><b>Syringe gruel</b> = canned food blended to milkshake-like consistency and warmed.</p> <p><b>Gruel</b> = canned food mixed to applesauce-like consistency and served warm on a plate.</p> <p>Any brand of premium <b>kitten</b> food is fine, but we recommend Nutro as it's high quality and cost effective!</p>
		<p><b>Kibble:</b> Once your kittens have their canines, have kibble available at all times, along with a bowl of water.</p> <p>Royal Canin Babycat is what we recommend, as it's highly palatable and the extra small kibble size is ideal for weaning kittens.</p> <p>Again, any brand of <i>premium</i> kitten kibble will do.</p>
Supplements for syringe gruel & gruel kittens		<p><b>Baby food:</b> Mix ~tablespoon of baby food with gruel or kibble for finicky eaters! Also useful for encouraging new gruelies to eat on their own. Buy <b>plain baby food</b> with no spices. Ingredients should <b>only</b> be turkey/chicken and turkey/chicken broth.</p> <p><b>Tomlyn Nutri-Cal:</b> Great for underweight kittens. Follow instructions on bottle and add appropriate amount to syringe gruel or gruel.</p>

Pro tip: Adding a bit of plain canned pumpkin (not pumpkin pie filling!) to gruel or syringe gruel and help with minor diarrhea/loose stool. **MAKE SURE YOU'RE WEIGHING YOUR KITTENS AFTER EVERY FEEDING TO ENSURE THAT THEY'VE GAINED THEIR 5%!!**



