



## Pregnant/Nursing Mom – Fostering Overview

**This packet is organized into two parts** – the first part details our policies and provides info on how the WHS fostering process works; the second part provides instructions for the actual birth of the kittens (if you're taking home a pregnant cat), and provides details on how to care for mama and kittens throughout their stay with you!

### Part One

**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!

**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 "Shakespeare 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!

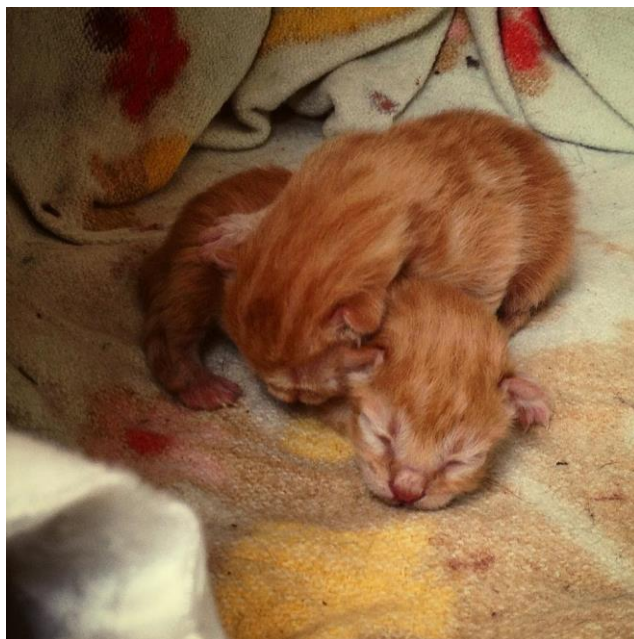
**!!!\*\* FOR MEDICAL EMERGENCIES CALL THE WHS EMERGENCY NUMBER\*\*!!!**  
**(503) 585-5900, ext. 333**

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!

### **GETTING MAMA CAT ADOPTED:**

The sooner her kittens are no longer nursing, the sooner mom can be spayed. **She must not be allowed to let her kittens nurse for 2 weeks before her spay.** Her milk must dry up before surgery because the mammary glands are located so close to the incision site. You have a couple of options for dealing with this:

- **You can separate mama from her kittens** when you see that the kittens are eating enough gruel/kibble to maintain (and gain!) their weights (generally around 7-8 weeks). This ensures that mama is able to come in for her spay appointment around the same time that her kittens are being spayed/neutered. If you are in a hurry to get mama adopted so that you can foster more kittens, this is the best choice.
- **Let kittens nurse from mom until they're adopted or mama kicks them off.** A lot of fosters find it very difficult or heartbreaking to separate mama from her kittens. If you're one of these fosters, do not despair! Allowing mom to nurse her kittens well after they require it is not going to cause any harm. Just keep in mind that the longer you allow mama to nurse, the longer you'll have to wait until she's able to be spayed. If you're in no rush to get rid of mama cat, this is the best option.



## Willamette Humane Society Bottle Baby Program – Supplies Needed




### 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 in case kittens need supplementary feeding
- ❑ 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 + nesting box (soft bed, box, plastic tub)
- ❑ 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> <p>This will only be necessary for underweight or rejected kittens.</p>
Kittens age 3-8 weeks (once canine teeth have begun to come in)		<p>Start putting out wet food mixed with water to an <i>applesauce consistency</i> when kittens are around <b>4 weeks old.</b></p> <p>This is the start of the weaning process – they should learn to eat on their own by watching mama!</p>
Kittens age 3-8 weeks (once canine teeth have begun to come in)		<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 will help with minor diarrhea/loose stool.

## Part Two

### **Pregnant Cat Guidelines**

Thank you so much for fostering a pregnant cat! This can be one of the most memorable, educational experiences that you'll ever have. Please read on to find an outline of what to expect during mama cat's pregnancy and what you need to do to prepare for her delivery.

#### **Required supplies for pregnant/nursing moms:**

- A box or tub large enough for mama to lie down and stretch out, such as an under-the-bed plastic storage tote. Mama should be able to get in and out easily, but kittens should not be able to get out.
- Electric heating pad that does not shut off automatically
- High quality canned **kitten food** for mom (to wean babies)
- Hard **kitten food** (kibble) for mom (and to wean babies) – we recommend Royal Canin Babycat
- Bottle kit with nipples OR 1 mL syringe in case kittens need supplementary feeding
- Powdered KMR formula in case kittens need supplementary feeding
- Empty room/bathroom to isolate mom and kittens
- Digital scale (food or postal) that weighs in grams
- Litter box and non-clumping litter
- Secure pet carrier for transportation

#### **Preparation for birth of kittens:**

The gestation period for cats is between 9 and 10 weeks. A couple of weeks before your cat is due to deliver, you need to prepare a “nesting box” – a safe and secure place for mama to deliver and care for her kittens. Mama cat should be isolated in a quiet area to get used to her surroundings for a while so she feels safe and secure for the birth. During the couple of weeks leading up to her kittens' birth, mama cat might exhibit some strange and/or uncharacteristic behaviors – some cats may become extremely affectionate, while others might become aggressive or fearful. Just remember that mama's hormones are raging during this time, so any out of the ordinary behavior is generally no cause for concern.

Pregnant cats should eat up to 4 times their normal amount of food and **should be eating kitten food for the duration of their pregnancy and while nursing kittens.**

#### **Setting up a nesting box:**

- There are many options for nesting boxes. You'll need a box that's wide enough to accommodate a heating pad on one side while leaving room for mama to nurse on the other side without lying on the heating pad.
- Line a box with blankets or towels. The box should be high enough off the ground so that mama can get in and out easily, but her kittens cannot - 8-12 inches tall or somewhere around this height is ideal.



- You can offer more than one option, with blankets in one corner and a box in another area.
- You can also place mama cat with her nesting box in a bathroom or small room with some light.
- You can even put the box in a bathtub, if using a bathroom, but be sure to cover the drain.
- Have heating pad only under blankets on one side of the box – your mama cat may be too warm if she has no other place to cool off.
- *Note:* Your mama cat may ignore the box until it's time for labor. If this is the case, just put her in it when the kittens are coming. She'll usually take to it just fine!

Medical emergencies to watch out for leading up to labor:

- **Any vaginal bleeding** during pregnancy is not normal and suggests that she is having a miscarriage. If this is occurring late in pregnancy (the 8<sup>th</sup> week), she may be delivering the litter prematurely, and a cesarean section is likely necessary.
- **Greenish, foul-smelling discharge** can be a sign of a uterine infection – if you see this, alert the Foster & Rescue Manager immediately at [foster@whs4pets.org](mailto:foster@whs4pets.org).

**\*\*\*Please note that if either of these two things occurs around the time of a mama's due date, it is likely just an indication that labor is imminent – usually within 24 hours!\*\*\***

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Labor

Several hours (and perhaps a whole day) of restlessness, grooming, nesting, pacing, panting, and crying indicate that labor has begun. Mama cat may purr during labor and when feeding her new kittens. When labor begins, there will be some brownish fluids and a small amount of blood. Babies can be born head first or feet first (breech), and will be delivered in a thin amniotic sac, which usually breaks during birth. As soon as the kitten emerges from mama's birth canal, she should immediately bite/pierce the sac and begin cleaning the kitten to encourage him/her to breathe. **If she does not do this, you will need to step in and break the sac, as the kitten is at risk of suffocating within seconds.** Wipe away the mucus and amniotic casing from the kitten's mouth and nose – once you do this, the kitten should cry out! At this point, the kitten is still attached to the placenta, which will be passed within a few minutes. Once the placenta is passed, the mother will bite the umbilical cord to cut it. Sometimes mama can take a while to bite the cord, especially if other kittens are already out and nursing, so feel free to help her by tying the cord with string/floss and cutting it with a pair of sterile scissors. Usually, the mother will then eat the placenta.

Kittens are usually born every 10 minutes to 1 hour. **If mama is having contractions for longer than 2 hours** in between kittens, this could mean that a baby is stuck in the birth canal, which can be deadly for mama and all remaining kittens *in utero*. **If this happens, you need to call the WHS emergency number immediately**, as mama will likely need an emergency cesarean section!

Some mama cats prefer to give birth in a dark, quiet place, far away from human contact, while others prefer to have their human right beside them, giving them pets and soothing them through this difficult process. She will generally let you know what she'd like – just pay attention to the body language and such.

If a kitten is stillborn, remove it from the nesting box as soon as possible. (This is very common.)

Once kittens are born and mama is nursing, she may like some food, which can be placed near her head so she can eat without disrupting the kittens.

Medical emergencies during/immediately following delivery:

- If at any point you see a **red membrane (like an earthworm)** protruding from the kitten's body, this is actually its intestine and is a medical emergency
- **Dystocia** – intense contractions for 60 minutes without a birth
- **Retained placenta** – if the placenta is not passed, it can cause infection

### **Caring for New Mom & Kittens**

Kittens generally **weigh between 80-120 grams** when they're born. Any kitten born **smaller than 70 grams** is at serious risk of fading away and will likely need to be supplemented with KMR and kept on a heating pad, separate from its littermates, until he/she weighs about the same as his/her littermates.

It is *not uncommon for the smallest kitten (runt) to pass away shortly after birth* – this is just nature taking its course. There's often not much we can do. Oftentimes mama will set this runt aside from her healthy kittens to allow it to pass peacefully so she can care for her kittens who are thriving. If a kitten is born weighing under 65 grams, there is often not much we can do. Remember that this is the reason cats have so many kittens – some are just not fit to make it in this world.

It is possible that the new mother will want to move her kittens frequently. This is okay as long as there is always a heating pad for the kittens to get to and the area is somewhat sequestered and free of hazards. More than likely, she is doing this in an effort to keep her babies safe. You can set up a few clean places with bedding ahead of time so the mom has safe options if she does move them.

**Weigh newborn kittens twice a day – this is mandatory!** If the mom seems protective or is moving her babies, wait until the day after they are born to weigh them. If she is comfortable with you there, place the scale right next to her while you weigh the babies. You should be seeing an average weight gain of 10 grams per day. If the weights stay steady for more than a day or you see a drop in weight, please contact your Foster Mentor. Even a small amount of weight loss in a kitten under one week old can be deadly, so please don't hesitate to reach out!



## 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 as Kittens Age

As the kittens get older, they're going to want to explore outside their nesting box – this generally happens around 4 weeks old! This is perfectly fine, but we want to make sure kittens are not allowed to stray too far from their mama and their heating pad!

Bathtubs are often great for this stage. Keep the heating pad available at all time, 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.

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!



Kittens should be introduced to the litter box around 4 weeks old, as well! They will generally learn from mama, so this process shouldn't be too messy! 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.

Around 6 weeks old, 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 OR TEXT THE WHS EMERGENCY NUMBER @ (503) 585-5900, ext. 333**

## 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.





