

BOTTLE BABY GUIDE FOR FOSTERS



5 PRIORITIES OF BOTTLE BABY CARE

- Warmth: Keeping kittens warm is a top priority of caring for bottle babies. Cold kittens cannot digest food properly and can become hypothermic.
- Nutrition: Fosters must give the correct formula in specific amounts to ensure bottle babies are receiving adequate nutrition.
- Weight Gain: Bottle babies should gain weight every day.
- Hygiene: It is vital to keep bottle babies clean and dry at all times.
- Development: Fosters are responsible for monitoring stages of development in their bottle babies, including readiness for weaning and litter box training.

CREATING A SAFE SPACE FOR BOTTLE BABIES

- Bottle babies require a safe space to grow and develop. We typically provide fosters with a small or medium transport crate that opens from the top. This can house kittens safely until they are old enough to start exploring on their own.
- Heat Source
 - Snuggle Safe Disk
 - Heating pad on low
 - Kittens must be provided an area that is not heated for them to move to if they get overheated.
- Bedding
 - Kittens must be provided soft, warm bedding to insulate their “nest” or crate.
- Draft-free environment
 - Kittens in their crate should be placed in a draft free environment to maintain a warm temperature inside the crate.
- Ambient temperature should hover around 85 degrees.
 - This can easily be achieved by lining the crate with bedding, covering it with a towel, and ensuring the heat source used stays warm.



TEMPERATURE MATTERS

KITTENS MUST BE WARM TO FEED

Cold kittens are unable to digest food properly. They are also in danger of hypothermia. It is imperative that kittens are warm at all times.

FORUMULA AND PREPARATION



- Kitten specific formula
 - CARE uses KMR (kitten milk replacer). You must use the proper “stage” or age range for this formula. Some are formulated for older kittens. Very young babies will eat stage one formula.
- Correct preparation
 - Bottles may be prepared in advance. They can be used for 24 hours, after which the bottle should be cleaned and remade.
 - Open containers of formula should be stored in the freezer.
 - For pre-made formula, cans must be used within 24 hours.
- Warming formula
 - Milk should be placed in the bottle or syringe the kittens will be fed from.
 - Place in hot water and wait for the bottle to come to temperature (about 100 degrees).
 - If the bottle is microwaved, there is a risk of hot spots, so be sure to shake the bottle thoroughly. Warming the bottle in hot water is the preferred method because it prevents hot spots and preserves some of the additives that are in the formula that may aid digestion.
- How to test temperature
 - Drip the milk from the bottle onto the inside of your wrist. It should feel warm, not hot.

HOW MUCH SHOULD BOTTLE BABIES EAT

30 mL (2 tbsp.) per 4 oz of body weight over
24 hours

This is an estimation. Some kittens may eat more and some may eat less. As long as the kitten is gaining weight daily, they are eating enough.

See the next slide for a helpful chart on determining how much bottle babies should eat.



Kitten Bottle Feeding and Stomach Capacity Chart

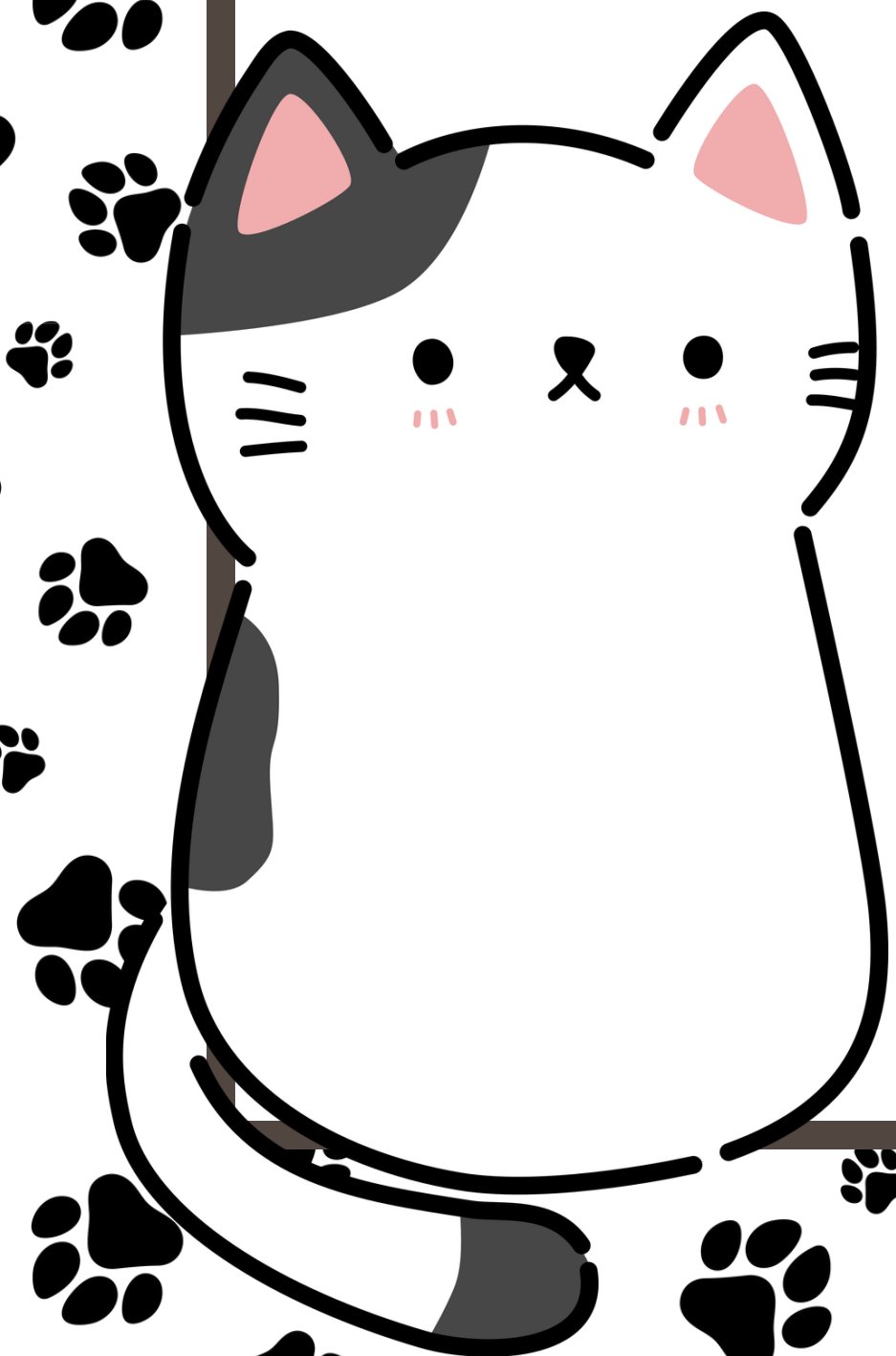
Estimated Kitten Age (weeks)	Kitten Weight (lbs, oz)	Kitten Weight (grams)	Daily Caloric Requirement*	Amount of Formula Per Day (ml)**	Amount Per Feeding (ml)*	Approximate Number of Feedings Per Day***
< 1 week	2 oz	57 g	11 kcal	15 ml	2 ml	7
	3 oz	85 g	17 kcal	23 ml	3 ml	7
	4 oz	113 g	23 kcal	31 ml	5 ml	7
1 week	5 oz	142 g	28 kcal	38 ml	6 ml	7
	6 oz	170 g	34 kcal	46 ml	7 ml	7
	7 oz	198 g	40 kcal	54 ml	8 ml	7
	8 oz	227 g	45 kcal	61 ml	9 ml	7
2 weeks	9 oz	255 g	51 kcal	69 ml	10 ml	7
	10 oz	283 g	57 kcal	77 ml	11 ml	7
	11 oz	312 g	62 kcal	84 ml	12 ml	6-7
3 weeks+	12 oz	340 g	68 kcal	92 ml	14 ml	6-7
	13 oz	369 g	74 kcal	100 ml	15 ml	6
	14 oz	397 g	79 kcal	107 ml	16 ml	5
	15 oz	425 g	85 kcal	115 ml	17 ml	5
4 weeks+	16 oz (1 lb)	454 g	91 kcal	123 ml	18 ml	5
	1 lb, 1 oz	482 g	96 kcal	130 ml	19 ml	4
	1 lb, 2 oz	510 g	102 kcal	138 ml	20 ml	4
	1 lb, 3 oz	539 g	108 kcal	146 ml	22 ml	4
5 weeks+	1 lb, 4 oz	567 g	113 kcal	153 ml	23 ml	4

WHEN SHOULD KITTENS EAT

Healthy kittens should be fed when they are awake.

You do not need to wake kittens every 2 hours for feedings.

Weak, ill, or underweight kittens require more frequent feedings.



BOTTLE POSITION

Kittens should be in a prone position (belly down).

The bottle should be held at a 45 degree angle.

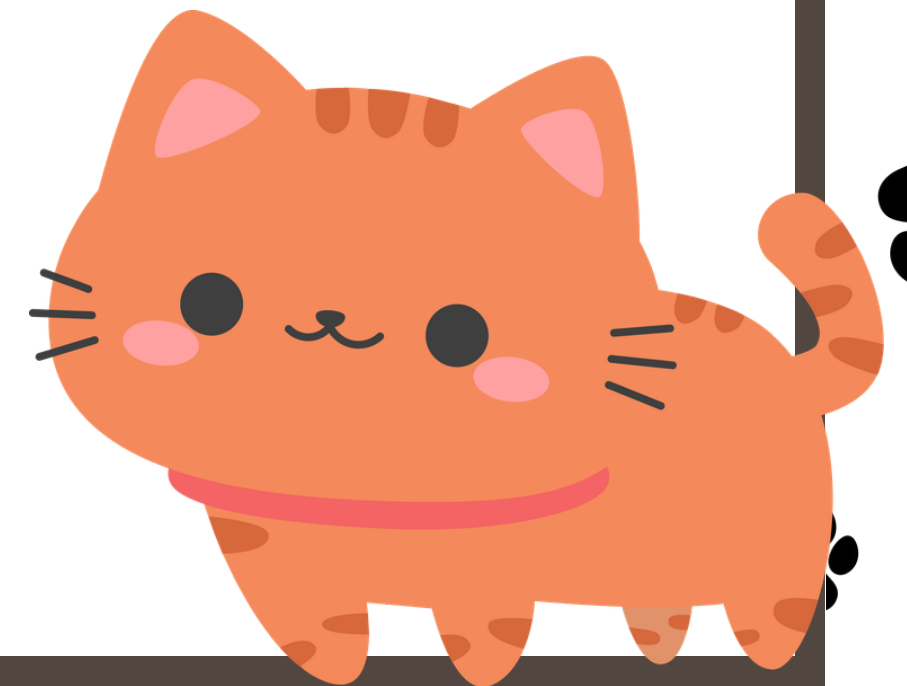
Never feed a bottle baby on their back, as this increases the risk for aspiration.

If the bottle baby is particularly wiggly, try wrapping them in a blanket or towel like a burrito to help them feel secure.



WHAT A GOOD FEEDING LOOKS LIKE

- Vacuum-like suction
- Bubbles rising in bottle as they drink
- Wiggling ears
- Allowing kitten to suckle at their own pace
- Kittens will naturally stop suckling when they are finished eating.
- You cannot overfeed a bottle baby, but you can feed too frequently, which may lead to gastrointestinal issues.



FEEDING A LITTER



Feed one kitten → Allow them to stop suckling naturally → Stimulate the kitten → Set them aside to rest → Feed the next kitten

Repeat this process as needed

Kittens who are full will have a pear-shaped belly when held upright under the front legs.

WEIGHT IS THE BEST INDICATOR OF GROWTH

Goal should be daily weight gain.

Kittens should be gaining 14 grams or $\frac{1}{2}$ oz per day.



HELPING KITTENS ELIMINATE

- Mother cats groom their kittens to stimulate urination and defecation. Fosters must perform this role until kittens are able to eliminate on their own, usually around 3-4 weeks.
- Before and after each feeding, rub the kittens lower abdomen, genitals, and anus with a soft cotton round or cloth dipped in warm water.
 - Always use a light-colored material so you can observe the color of the urine and feces.
 - Pale yellow urine is ideal. Dark urine may indicate dehydration.
- Avoid overstimulation, which can irritate sensitive areas.
- Urination should occur with every stimulation. Defecation should occur at least once daily.
- If a kitten goes longer than 48 hours without defecating, fosters should contact CARE for assistance.

WEANING

Step 1 (3-4 weeks): Introduce lapping

- Start by placing kitten formula or a mix of formula and wet food (gruel) on your finger. Once the kitten licks from your finger, move to a spoon.

Step 2: Progress to a dish

- When the kitten begins to lap confidently, offer gruel in a shallow dish. Expect them to walk on it or bite the edge. It may take several meals for them to catch on.

Step 3: Prepare weaning gruel

- Mix warm canned kitten food with formula to form a thin consistency. Gradually thicken it over time and reduce the amount of formula as the kitten adjusts.

Notes

- Be patient and persistent
- Not all kittens like wet food. Always have kibble available when weaning.
- Kittens may require supplemental bottle feeding during weaning.
- Once kittens are eating thicker gruel, provide fresh water.
- Many kittens will walk through their food. Always clean and dry kittens thoroughly.
- You can also introduce gruel in a bottle. Eventually they will need to transition to a bowl.

LITTER BOX TRAINING

- Kittens do not need to be trained to use a litterbox. Placing a puppy pad near where they sleep can help you recognize when they are ready to transition to a litterbox.
- When they begin moving away from their sleeping area to eliminate on the puppy pad, they are developmentally ready for the box.
- Place a shallow litterbox in the kitten's cage with non-clumping litter or pellets.
- Provide dry kitten food around the same time so kittens don't mistake the litter for food.
- If a kitten defecates outside the box, place the feces into the box to help them associate the scent with the appropriate spot.
- Unless heavily soiled, scoop, but do not deep clean the litterbox until the kitten is using it reliably for smell association.

RESOURCES

- [Living Library: Guide to Raising Unweaned & Underage Kittens](#)
- [2025_Bottle Feeding Best Practices_V3](#)
- [Foster Resources - Kitten College](#)
- [2025_Bottle Feeding Chart_V4.png](#)
- [Maddie's University | Animal Welfare Education Courses: Taking the Fear out of Bottle Feeding and Basic Kitten Care](#)
- [2026_Tiny Kittens, Big Responsibility_VI](#)
- [Campus Resources - Kitten College](#)
- [2026_KittenWellnessLog_8.5x11](#)

Remember to contact Ella at the emergency line (334) 750-0002 with any urgent needs. Non-urgent questions may be directed to foster@carehumane.org.

