



Nursing Kittens and Puppies

March 2021

SPCA of Wake County welcomes you to our class series for Nursing Kitten and Puppies! We rely on the support of our volunteers to foster some of our puppies and kittens, especially those that are the most at risk in the shelter environment. Moms with babies and neonates are a big responsibility to ensure that they grow up healthy and well-adjusted so he/she can be adopted. We are offering two workshops so that you can be confident in the work you're doing to help us save more lives.

Raising an infant puppy or kitten is challenging, but very rewarding. For bottle feeders, you have to adapt your life for a few weeks to a strict feeding schedule. For moms with babies, the first few weeks will be all about supporting momma. You'll have extra laundry – and extra snuggles. There will be times when you are exhausted and want to cry while other times so filled with joy when they master a new skill. You're preparing the little one(s) for his or her new life with a forever family, and that is always time-consuming, messy, and 100% worth it!

When you pick up your foster pet(s), you will receive a contact number in case of emergency or if you have any questions or concerns during the foster period. If there are any questions that are not answered in this training please let us know at the end. Thank you so much for attending today and helping us save lives!

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Environment

Puppies and kittens are excellent crawlers and they must be kept in a secure area at all times.

- You want to provide a warm nest. Rolled towels inside a crate or carrier work very well.
 - Make sure the towels have no strings, because even newborns can get tangled in the strings. This could result in serious injury, including strangulation and loss of circulation.
 - Make sure they can't fit their heads in any holes inside your crates, carriers or whelping area. They could get stuck!
 - Flannel baby blankets are also good.
- To keep the puppy or kitten warm, you can use a Snugglesafe heating disc, or rice socks, which you will warm in the microwave. These socks are also good for forming the sides of the nest.
 - Please note that youngsters tend to get chilled and they must have a way to stay warm.
 - Wrap the socks or water bottle in towels.
 - Make sure there is an area without a heat source. He must be able to crawl away from the source of warmth.
 - **It is not recommended that you use a heating pad under any circumstances.**
 - For nursing moms, they are the main heat source for babies so heating disks and rice socks should only be provided during mom's break time.
- Heating Discs
 - Heating discs are specially designed to keep pets warm without risk of overheating when heated properly. They also have washable covers! While the SPCA would like to have these on hand, we cannot guarantee that we will due to their cost. If you would like to purchase your own, you can find them in most Pet Supply stores and online at Amazon.com for ~\$25.
- Rice Socks
 - Rice socks are a cost effective way to keep puppies warm. They can be reused or simply thrown away when they get too yucky. The SPCA will have these readily available for use, however they are easy to make if you run out of fresh clean ones and need more right away. You can also get pretty creative with these!
- When he is able to walk on his own, provide supervised play and exercise time.
 - He will need his rest when he's finished playing. Always put him back in his own carrier or crate for safety.
 - When he's a bit bigger and more active, he can join the family for parts of the day and evening. This acclimates him to living in a home. But he should spend the night in his own carrier or crate.
- Create a stress free zone for mom and babies!
 - Being a mom is hard work, playing soothing music to help eliminate other noises in the home like dishwashers or barking dogs.
 - Partially cover crates/ carriers for felines, small pets and bottle feeders. Keep the family in a room where you can shut the door not only helps eliminate noise, but keeps separate from personal pets and exposure to anything they may have picked up from outside.

Nursing Mom's

It is important to monitor weight to ensure they are nursing enough or receiving the right amount of milk. It's important to document weight on a daily basis. If Mom is nursing, pay attention to who is nursing. If you notice a puppy or kitten is not nursing as often and seems smaller, contact the Foster Coordinator for guidance and try:

- Moving the puppy or kitten to mom's teat often.
- Giving the puppy or kitten alone time to nurse with Mom.

If babies are crying frequently or mom is refusing to nurse, this is an emergency situation and the family needs to be seen by a veterinarian asap.

Baby's best chance is going to be with mom and it's hard for infants to switch from teat to bottle, so this will be our last resort if the puppy/kitten isn't nursing and under the direction of the Foster Coordinator and medical staff.

Making the Formula

Commercial formulas are closely matched nutritionally to mothers' milk. Puppy formula is different from kitten formula, so check the package to see that you have the right formula. Make sure you are using Esbilac for puppies and KMR for kittens

- **Do not** feed cows or goats milk under any circumstances.
- Mix the formula according to package directions. Make only enough for one or two feedings.
- Let the formula settle before you feed it to the puppy or kitten. The mixing aerates the formula, and the bubbles will cause stomach upset.
- You can feed the formula room temperature after you have mixed it. If the formula has been refrigerated, you will need to warm it.
 - Check your microwave to see how long it takes to warm it to just above or at room temperature. Test a drop on the inside of your wrist.
 - Make sure the formula is mixed again after microwaving, as there can be pockets of hot liquid or clumps of formula.
- Always keep any unused, mixed formula (liquid) in the refrigerator.
 - Once mixed, good for 24 hrs.
- Any open containers of formula, not mixed (powdered), are best kept in the freezer.
 - Good for 3 months.
- The SPCA will supply the formula. Just let us know before you run out. If you run out, there are several places you can buy it, but **please do not change brands**. They are each formulated a bit differently and can upset the puppy's or kitten's stomach if you change abruptly.
 - Favorite brands of kitten/ puppy formula
 - KMR (kittens) & Esbilac (puppies)
 - Breeder's Edge
 - GNC
 - If you absolutely must switch brands, add a little extra water to the first few batches.

- If you have been using powder, stick to powder and vice versa. Don't switch back and forth between liquid and powder.
- o If you are using liquid formula, pour what you need into a jar and add some water.
- o Here are some local stores that carry puppy and kitten formula.
 - Tractor Supply/AGRI
 - PetSmart
 - Walmart
- Use bottles made for puppies and kittens. Do not use any other bottle unless you have approval from your Foster Coordinator.
- **Do not overfeed.** Baby bottles allow for a better or faster flow than a teat would, so puppies can tend to overeat in a very short period of time.
 - o Overfeeding can cause vomiting and/or diarrhea which can be life-threatening to neonates. Contact the Foster Coordinator asap if these symptoms occur.

Bottle Feeding Basics

Now that you have made the formula, it's time to feed your baby puppy or kitten and help eliminate with stimulation. **Refer to slide on stimulation for more information.** Feeding time is also a great opportunity to begin socializing your newborn with human interaction, as you handle him/her gently and tend to their needs.



- We instinctively want to hold any baby on his or her back to nurse. For human babies, that's great, but that's not how puppies and kittens naturally nurse with their mother.
- For a puppy or kitten, it's best to hold him upright, with his spine along the palm of your "holding" hand, and your fingers holding him firmly but gently around his abdomen and chest. He may be squirmy.
 - o Hold the bottle even with his mouth. His head should be tilted slightly upward. *Refer to the above picture.*
 - o **Do not squeeze the bottle.**
 - o A puppy or kitten can aspirate the formula into his lungs if he drinks it too fast or if he's on his back while being fed.
- It takes a few feedings for you to get comfortable with each other. The baby will get used to eating from the bottle quickly.
- A newborn should be fed round the clock.
 - o Typically a newborn kitten will eat around 2 cc's of formula at first.
 - o Puppies come in all sizes so the amount your newborn puppy needs will vary. His abdomen should feel full, but not distended.

*****While it would be nice for kittens and puppies to eat on a regular schedule, it is not always the case. Until you figure out a feeding schedule that works for your infants, you may be giving smaller, more frequent feedings*****

- Overfeeding can be dangerous. A kitten or puppy should eat about 8mls of formula per ounce of body weight per day. For example, a kitten who weighs 4 ounces should eat about 32 mls of formula per day. To determine how much to give at each feeding, divide the total amount of formula per day by the number of feedings. At this age, they need to be fed every 2-3 hours (this includes night as well), **depending on their needs**. Here is an idea of what the next several weeks might look like:

0 – 3 Weeks

- Bottle feed formula every 2-3 hours
- Remember to keep warm with a heat source under lots of blankets or towels. Refer to the section on Heating Sources for more important information (Slide 6). Keep the box or crate covered with a towel to keep them warm as well as reducing outside sounds and stimulation.

3 – 5 Weeks

- Bottle feed formula every 3-4 hours.
- A heat source and bowel stimulation will still be needed.

5+ Weeks

- Feed formula every 4-6 hours, and up to 8 hours
- You can begin to introduce solids. Mix canned pate with baby formula in a small bowl. It should look like a gruel.
- As you can see, the older the kitten or puppy gets, the longer he can wait between feedings. Refer to the chart on slide 19 for how often your puppy or kitten should be fed.
- Use a soft cloth with warm water to wash his face and paws after he's eaten.
 - Dried formula gets matted in the fur, and can cause real problems. Sometimes the area can get infected.
 - Keeping your puppies and kittens clean is the first line of defense against illness.

Weaning

It does seem like he will never stop wanting the bottle/ syringe or nursing on mom, but the puppy or kitten will eventually be weaned. Most kittens and puppies will start trying gruel around 4-5 weeks of age. If you have a queen or mom dog, they'll let you know it's time to introduce solids when she becomes less patient for nursing. Be warned, this is a messy process and they will wear the food before they eat it!

- When the puppy or kitten is beginning to walk, provide a shallow bowl of water when you're supervising him. He's going to be very wobbly and could spill it, so you won't want to leave it when you're not there. You don't want the little one to be wet.
- When he's used to drinking the water, offer him some formula in a small bowl. Show it to him. He probably will spill it when he's walking through it. Be patient with him and keep trying. Praise him when he drinks the formula.
- You will still be bottle feeding him at regular intervals.
- After a few days of formula in the bowl, begin offering watered down wet food.
 - Pate tends to be the easiest texture for babies to start with and mix with water. Royal Canin: Mom & Baby Cat wet food and Weruva for felines tend to be good mixing brands of pate.

- o Bottle feeders only: you can also mix the formula with wet food
- o Wet food is not only easier than dry food, but is a safer and healthier transition than kibble.
- After they master the gruel and/ or they begin to show signs of wanting to chew, you can try soaked puppy chow or kitten chow.
 - o Look for dry food that advertises small bites to make it easier to chew and swallow to reduce the chances of choking. *Royal Canin: Mom & Baby Cat* for kittens and *Hills: Science Diet Small Breed* for puppies are 2 brands that we recommend.
 - o Use a small shallow dish, like a single-serving frozen dinner tray, and cover the bottom with chow. Pour just enough water in it to cover the chow. Let it soak for up to an hour or until the chow is spongy, not mushy.
 - o Do not soak the chow in formula.
 - o Scoop some out into a flat dish, and refrigerate the rest.
 - o Pour some warmed formula over the soaked chow.
 - o Gradually reduce the amount of formula you put on the soaked chow. This could take several days. You'll eventually be feeding him just the soaked chow without formula.
- When he's eating the soaked chow, provide a small bowl of dry chow, too. Some puppies and kittens take to that more quickly than others, and prefer it to the soaked.
- As he is eating more on his own, continue to offer the bottle or syringe regularly. For moms with babies, they will still nurse from time to time as long as mom allows.
 - o Gradually reduce the number of times he gets his bottle, until you're down to once or twice a day. Do that for a few days, and then eliminate the bottle- or syringe-feedings completely. He will be getting all he needs from the kitten or puppy chow.

Housebreaking and Litter Box Training

When your little one shows signs of readiness, it's time to begin his bathroom training.

- Puppies do well with indoor training pads when they're young. You also may want to use these underneath the bedding.
 - o When he's about three or four weeks old, take the puppy outside after each feeding.
 - o Remember to keep puppies on a leash at all times, even if your yard is fenced in.
 - o Take him to the very same spot and ignore the puppy until he gets busy.
 - o As soon as he is done his business (and not before) and praise him. This teaches him that going potty outside in the presence of a human is a GREAT idea, which in turn teaches the puppy to seek a human when he or she has to go!
- Kittens instinctively know to use a litter box.
 - o Use an aluminum pie pan, a small dish tub or something that a young kitten can easily climb into and out of. Put about an inch of litter in it. Do not use clumping litter.
 - o You can put him in his litter after each feeding when he's about three weeks old.
 - o Praise him when he urinates and defecates.
 - o Eventually, he will graduate to a real litter box, when he can climb into and out of it. It's best to use an open litter box at first before you use a lidded one.

Other Notes

We've covered the basics of caring for the kitten or puppy. Here are some tips for helping your foster pet(s) acclimate into your household while in your care.

General notes for all

- Wash hands before and after handling to limit exposure to microbes that may be harmful since the moms and babies have a lower immune system.
- Regularly change out bedding. No one wants to sit in pee, poop or food remnants!
- Personal pets should be fully vaccinated and remain separate for the majority of the foster period. Consult with the Foster Coordinator prior to introducing any personal pets.
 - Even when highly supervised, an adult pet can easily injure and/or kill a baby kitten or puppy. When in doubt, don't introduce them!
- Supervise small children when playing with the baby or holding. Proper handling for anyone holding newborns should be in a seated position, ideally on the floor or at a table with a blanket in case the pet squirms out of hands and falls.
- Please limit the number of people outside your family who want to visit with the babies and/ or momma. It's a very stressful time for all!

Mom dogs with puppies

- If there is a mother dog, it is advised you do not let your pets come to the whelping area or near the puppies. Mom's are naturally protective of their little ones and we want to keep all parties safe and avoid fights.
- Mothers can be introduced to other (vaccinated) dogs in a neutral area, like in a fenced yard or on walks when they need a break from nursing.
 - Be sure to wipe paws prior to going back into the whelping area.
- Once puppies are weaned and have had their first vaccinations, they can be introduced to any vaccinated personal pets for socialization under close supervision.
 - Again, not in the whelping area and not with mom dog present.
 - Ask the Foster Coordinator prior to introducing and for additional safety tips.

Queens with their kittens

- It is not recommended to introduce dogs to queens and their kittens. Not only is this highly stressful for mom because they are prey animals, but they are naturally protective of their little ones and we want to keep all parties safe and avoid fights.
- For anti-social/ feral felines that are nursing, less is more when it comes to their supporting care. Only check on babies 1-2 times a day for weighing, as mom may not nurse while in the room.
 - keep a carrier or feral box in the area to easily close mom off while handling the kittens.
 - Once kittens are starting to eat solids, contact the Foster Coordinator about separating mom and beginning the socialization process for babies.
- Kittens can be introduced to fully vaccinated personal cats after they have had their first vaccinations and under close supervision.

- You know your personal cat best, if they don't adjust easily to change or are hit and miss with other animals, then don't introduce them to the kitten(s)!
- Again, not in the whelping area and not with mom present.
- Ask the Foster Coordinator prior to introducing and for additional safety tips.

Bottle Feeders

- If you have personal pets, they must be fully vaccinated before coming in contact with the bottle feeders and ideally after the baby has received their first shots.
 - This must be done under close supervision. It takes time for any pet to become adjusted to a new friend and first meetings may not go well.
 - Bottle feeder kittens are not recommended to be introduced to dogs. Not only can dogs be super scary for kittens because they are prey animals, but they have no protection and can easily be killed/ injured by canines even when supervised.
 - It's nice when you can acclimate puppies or kittens to other pets, so that we can indicate on his biography that the kitten gets along with other cats, for instance, or the puppy is not going to chase cats.

Remember, enjoy your time with your foster pet(s). We recognize that it's hard to say goodbye. Please know that because of your care and hard work, we will be able to adopt him/her into a loving family!

Weight Gain Guidelines

Kittens:

Kittens should gain about ½ ounce (14 grams) per day or 4 ounces (113 grams) per week. Kittens that are not gaining at this rate will need an exam with the veterinarian to check for illness. Make sure you are weighing your kittens at the same time every day and in the same condition. If your first weight is before you feed, make sure all your weights are about the same time and before you feed.

Daily weight gain	0.5oz	14 grams
Weekly weight gain	4 ounces	113 grams

Puppies:

Puppy weight gain is a little more complicated since the breeds can vary so much in size. In general, puppies should be gaining approximately 10% of their current body weight per day. For example, a 3 pound puppy should gain 0.3lb that day. The next day, pup would weigh 3.3lb and should gain 0.33lb that day. Puppies should also double their weight from birth by 10 days old.

To calculate the appropriate daily weight gain:

Body weight in pounds x 0.1 = weight gain needed per day

Example: 4.5 pound puppy x 0.1 = 0.45lb weight gain needed

To calculate the appropriate total weight change for 24 hours:

Body weight in pounds x 1.1 = estimated appropriate total weight

Example: 2.6 pound pup x 1.1 = 2.86 pound is appropriate total weight