



## **Kitten Fostering Handbook**

The Austin Humane Society relies on a pool of dedicated and compassionate foster volunteers to care for kittens who are too young to be adopted. Neonatal kittens (kittens under 3 weeks old) are some of the most vulnerable animals we serve at AHS. Because of foster volunteers like you, we are able to provide the intensive and specialized care these babies need to survive and thrive. Below you will find information on how to care for kittens and how to be a successful foster for AHS. Thank you for your support and for helping us save lives!



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## Introduction to Kittens

Kittens under the age of 8 weeks are too young for our adoption program and require specialized care in a foster home. Caring for tiny kittens is much like caring for human babies. Depending on their age, they may require bottle feedings every few hours, assistance with elimination, temperature regulation and socialization. However, proper care for these babies can easily be learned and the rewards are endless! During the spring in Texas, we see thousands of kittens born to stray and feral moms. Many of these kittens end up in shelters because the mom was unable to care for them. This is where foster parents step in. Fostering kittens is basically recreating the job of the mom- feeding, pottyng, grooming, and providing LOTS of love! Unfortunately, the more kittens you foster, the more likely it is that you may have one that does not survive. It is estimated that approximately 20% of kittens die in the wild even with their mothers. Motherless kittens are at high risk for mortality- and we do lose tiny kittens. However, we save MANY more kittens than we lose, and these babies grow up to quickly find their forever homes!

### Birth Weight

Healthy kittens weigh about 3-4 ounces at birth and quickly gain weight, doubling their birth weight by one week old. We like to see a weight gain of about ½ oz a day for young kittens. Below you will find average kitten weights based on age:

Age (in days)	Avg. Weight
1	2.5- 4.75 oz.
5	3- 7 oz.
10	4.5 – 9.75 oz.
15	6- 11.75 oz.
20	7.5- 14.5 oz.
25	8 – 16.75 oz.

### Temperature

The average temperature of newborn kittens will be 96-100 degrees F. Normal temperatures are 96-99F for 0-2 weeks, 98-100F for 2-4 weeks, and 100-101F for 4-6 weeks. Neonatal kittens do not have the ability to regulate their own temperature and are dependent upon their mother, or an artificial heat source for warmth. The largest threat to the well being of a young kitten is chilling. Hypothermia sets in quickly if not kept warm. However, warming too quickly is also dangerous. Keeping a consistent warm temperature is key to caring for these babies.

#### Ways to warm a chilled kitten:

1. Wrap a hot water bottle or sock filled with dry rice in a towel and place it next to the kitten. Make sure the bottle or rice filled sock is warm but not too hot to hold against your own skin for 20 seconds comfortably.
2. Place a heating pad (on lowest setting) down one side of a cardboard box and half way underneath the box. Place a towel at the bottom of the box. Make sure the kitten has room



to move away from the heating pad if necessary but not enough room to lose its way back to the warmth

Never feed a kitten that is cold as they cannot digest food when they are chilled. Wait until the kitten is sufficiently warmed up before feeding.

## Eyes and Ears

Kittens are born with closed eyes and closed ear canals and cannot see or hear during the early days of life. Typically, kittens begin to gain hearing capability between 5-8 days of life and their eyes begin to open in the second week. By three weeks of age they should be able to fully see and hear the world around them.

## Hygiene

It is very important to keep the kitten's environment as clean as possible. Wash your hands before touching the kitten and before preparing food or feeding the kitten. If handling other pets or fosters, please change your shirt before working with the kitten.

## Dehydration

Kittens can become dehydrated very quickly from not eating/drinking. When a kitten has diarrhea, it is a good idea to mix the kitten's bottle with Pedia-lyte in place of water. This will help prevent dehydration. If the diarrhea is severe (lasting over 24 hours) or contains blood, please contact the Foster Care Coordinator to schedule a time to bring the kitten in to be seen by a clinic staff member.

Severe dehydration in kittens requires immediate intervention. The most effective way to test for dehydration is to "tent" the skin on the kitten's back. This is done by pick up a fold of skin and watching what happens when you release the skin- it should spring back into shape. If the skin remains in a ridge, the kitten is dehydrated.

If you believe your foster kitten is dehydrated, contact the Foster Care Coordinator to schedule a time to bring the kitten in to be seen by a clinic staff member. Please keep track of what and when the kitten ate last.

## Kitten Care

The following list of supplies will be helpful in caring for kittens. Some supplies are age specific. Our Foster Care Coordinator will be happy to advise you on what supplies are necessary for each foster situation.

### **SUPPLIES:**

- Nesting box/Crate
- Newspaper
- Paper towels
- Unscented baby wipes
- Plenty of old towels and /or blankets
- Heating Pad (without automatic shut off)
- Gauze or cotton balls
- Scale (with ounces)



Syringes (no needles)  
Small kitten bottle and nipple  
Small bowls, plates, dishes  
Formula (21<sup>st</sup> Century and KMR are brands easily purchased at pet food stores)  
Soft canned kitten food  
Pedia-lyte  
Meat flavored baby food (no onion)  
Baby rectal thermometer

## **NESTBOX**

The nestbox, or area where you will keep the kittens, should be large enough for the kittens to move around, but not too much larger. All kittens should be kept together in the same crate. Small plastic airline crates or hamster cages work wonderfully for housing tiny kittens. Line the crate with newspapers or towels. Place a heating pad wrapped in towels and waterproof pads on one side of the crate so that the kittens can choose whether to be on or away from the heat source. The heating pad should always be on the lowest setting and should not automatically shut off. Test the temperature of the heated area often to make sure it's not too hot for you to touch it for 20 seconds comfortably.

During the first week of life, the kitten housing area should be kept at a temperature between 85 and 90 degrees F. The temperature may then be lowered 5 degrees each week of life until 70 degrees F is reached.

Make sure the crate is not near an open window or drafty area. If you choose to use a box without a top, make sure the sides are tall enough so that the kittens cannot crawl or fall out. Change the bedding in the box daily until the kittens start litter training.

## **Feeding Formula**

Neonate kittens have only a minimal amount of fat on their bodies. Thus, frequent feedings are required to maintain adequate blood sugar levels and provide energy for metabolism.

## **NEVER FEED A KITTEN COW'S MILK OR HUMAN BABY FORMULA!**

Pet food stores and veterinarians carry feline formulas that contain closely matching nutrients to those in their mother's milk. At the Austin Humane Society, we use 21<sup>st</sup> Century kitten formula, but there are other brands that are suitable as well.

Reference guide for feeding quantities based on weight (note these are averages):



Age in Weeks	Avg. Weight	cc of formula/day	Feedings per day
1	4 oz.	32 cc	6
2	7 oz.	56cc	4
3	10 oz.	80cc	3
4	13 oz.	104 cc	3
5	1 lb.	128 cc	3

Use a small bottle designed for animals which can be purchased at a pet supply store. A 5/8” nipple usually works best. Human baby bottles are not appropriate for feeding kittens.

**Preparing formula:**

If using a bottle, you may need to make the hole in the nipple a little larger to allow the milk to flow through. Do this by snipping the top of the nipple with scissors very slightly to make an X. You want to make the hole large enough to allow milk to **drop slowly** from the nipple when the bottle is inverted. If milk runs out of the hole in a stream, the hole is too big and can cause the kitten to aspirate milk into its lungs. Warm the formula to approximately 100 degrees F. The formula should feel warm on your wrist at this temperature.

**Feeding the kitten:**

Start by covering your lap with a towel or blanket. Take the kitten in your lap and “scruff” her like mama cat would do to move her from place to place. You want to feed her while she is on her stomach (not on her back like we feed human babies or upright). Placing the kitten on her stomach helps prevent the milk from entering the windpipe – this is very important! Try to angle the bottle so that air does not go into the stomach. Encourage suckling by keeping a slight pull on the bottle. Be careful not to overfeed. Overfeeding can lead to diarrhea and other problems. You will usually see bubbles forming around the kitten’s mouth when it’s full.

**Burping the kitten:**

ALWAYS burp the kitten after each feeding. Do this by rubbing and patting the kitten’s back.

As the kittens grow, the number of feedings and their frequency can be decreased (typically 7-8 feedings/day up to 2wks, 6-7 feedings/day 2-3 wks, 5-6 feedings/day 3-4wks, and 4-5 feedings/day while beginning to wean at 4-6 wks. Also, as they grow they can let you know better when they are actually hungry. Kittens that are not getting enough nourishment may cry continuously, suck on each other or on themselves, and they may have prominent hips or backbones. Daily weight measurements are helpful to ensure kittens are eating enough and growing properly.

**Overfeeding:**

Kittens have tiny stomachs and can only handle small amounts of food at each feeding. Overfeeding a kitten can cause diarrhea which can lead to dehydration and ultimately, if left untreated, death to the kitten.



Normal kitten stool should be firm and yellowish in color. Loose yellow stool is a sign of mild overfeeding. Greenish stool indicates food is passing too rapidly through her digestive system. Grayish stool with a foul odor indicates inadequate digestion of formula and is the most serious form of diarrhea. If you notice indications of overfeeding, correct the feeding conditions immediately. Make sure you are administering the correct amount of formula at each feeding. If you are administering the correct amount, and the stool is loose and yellow, you can dilute the formula with 1/3 water. When the stool appears yellow and firm, you can return to feeding the full strength formula. If reducing the formula does not help the diarrhea or if the stools are grayish or green in color, please contact our Foster Care Coordinator or bring the kitten in to the shelter for our clinic to evaluate (8am-7pm Mon-Sat, 8am-5pm Sun).

### **Underfeeding:**

Underfed kittens are equally at risk for complications. Kittens that are underfed are restless and cry excessively. It will eventually appear listless and apathetic. Eventually, these kittens will become dehydrated and chilled. If you think your foster kitten is suffering from underfeeding, make sure to check the amounts you are feeding and consult our Foster Care Coordinator for more guidance.

### **Weight Checks:**

Keeping a tab on weight increase is key to making sure kittens are thriving. Kittens should be weighed daily for the first two weeks, and then weighed every three days until they are one month old. **We have supplied a weight chart for you to use in order to track your kitten's weight.**

### **Stimulation for Urination/Defecation**

After each meal, the kitten must be stimulated to urinate and defecate. When kittens are with their mom she takes care of this by licking the kittens in order to stimulate their bowels. For motherless kittens, use a cotton ball dampened with warm water to massage the kitten's anal and urinary areas. This process is necessary after each meal until the kitten can eliminate on her own, usually around 3 weeks of age. At this time you can start putting the kitten in a litter box to encourage it to go on its own. Drawer organizers purchased at office supply stores make great litterboxes for tiny kittens. Some kittens eat litter, so pelleted non-clumping litter should be used if possible.

### **Weaning Kittens onto Solids**

At about 3- 4 weeks of age you may start mixing in soft canned food with the formula and offering it in a shallow bowl to begin the weaning process. Continue to bottle feed until you are certain they are eating well on their own. Begin offering hard kitten kibble at this age as well, they may surprise you! Young animals that have been separated from their mothers too soon often lack the instinct to eat from a bowl and need some encouragement. Here are some tips:

- Watering food down, heating it up and offering it directly to their lips with your finger or a spoon may sometimes give them the idea. Kittens at or under one pound need to be encouraged to eat at least every **four** hours and weighed daily to ensure weight gain.





- If the kittens do not seem interested in canned kitten food, try canned chicken or tuna. Pouring the liquid from canned chicken or tuna onto other types of food will often work. Add more water to the can, refrigerate it and you'll have more "juice" ready for next time.
- Chicken, turkey or beef flavored baby food will often be an appealing consistency and flavor to kittens (no onion flavored food). Baby food is not a balanced diet for long term use in kittens, so use this only to encourage eating of kitten/cat food.
- Nutri-Cal is an over the counter calorie supplement that can be added to any of the above recipes to add calories.
- Karo Syrup can be purchased at any grocery store and can be applied directly to the kitten's gums or food to add immediate calories and to raise the kitten's blood sugar.

## Common Medical Problems

### External Parasites

Most kittens born outside have fleas, lice and/or ear mites. Fleas are most common and need to be removed as soon as possible. Our staff will administer flea treatment that is appropriate for the age of the kitten. Give the infant a flea comb bath. In a bowl, mix warm water and Dawn dish soap. Take care not to submerge the infant in water. Dip the flea comb in the warm soapy water and brush the infant down to remove all of the fleas and **DRY COMPLETELY**. Keeping the kitten as warm as possible is extremely important. At 4 weeks of age, our staff can administer Capstar to kill the adult fleas on its body within one hour, lasting 6-8 hours. At 8 weeks of age, our staff will administer monthly flea prevention.

Typical signs of ear mites include headshaking, pawing and scratching at the ear, or brown flaky debris in the ear canals. If we have not already administered medication for this condition or if the kitten continues to have problems with its ears, please call our foster care department to bring the kitten in for evaluation.

### Diarrhea

The **most common** cause of diarrhea in bottle baby kittens is diet. These kittens must abruptly adjust to formula after many have nursed on their mothers. It is vital that the type and recipe for the formula used is consistent, or further digestive problems will likely occur. Just like human babies, any changes to the diet must be made very gradually (over several days) to avoid causing gastrointestinal upset.

Another possible cause for diarrhea in kittens is intestinal parasites.



## Intestinal Parasites

The most common intestinal parasites in kittens are roundworms, hookworms, and tapeworms as well as giardia and coccidia and may often cause diarrhea, vomiting, or lethargy in kittens.

### Roundworms

Kittens infected with roundworms typically lose their appetite, appear depressed, have diarrhea, become anemic and pass mucus or blood in their stool. Roundworms may be visible in the feces.

### Hookworms

Very black and possibly bloody stool can be an indication of hookworms and should not be ignored.

### Tapeworms

Tapeworms are not life threatening and are not contagious. You may notice white rice looking segments around the anus. Tapeworms are contracted by eating fleas that have ingested tapeworm eggs.

### Giardia

Giardia is a parasite in the small intestine that interferes with the absorption of nutrients and fluids. This may lead to severe diarrhea.

### Coccidia

Coccidia is also a parasite of the small intestine and indications of this parasite are mucus and blood in the stool. Kittens with coccidia often have yellow, runny stool.

If you notice diarrhea in your foster kitten(s), please contact our foster care department or bring your kitten(s) in during regular business hours to be seen by our clinic staff (8am-7pm, M-F, 8am-5pm Sunday). Please be sure to provide a fresh stool sample at the time of the appointment when possible.

## Respiratory Illness

Kittens commonly experience respiratory illness, which can include nasal discharge, sneezing, coughing, eye discharge, or swollen eyes. Many of the causes of respiratory disease are viral, so supportive care is most beneficial. Supportive care may include fluid therapy, eye lubricants to prevent ulcerations (these viruses cause dry eye), drugs to support the immune system, nebulization, or antiviral medications. At times, antibiotics may be needed. If you notice respiratory symptoms in your kitten(s), please bring them to the shelter for evaluation by our clinic staff.



## Emergent vs. Non-emergent Medical Issues

The following is a list of symptoms that may indicate an emergency situation. If you feel that your foster kitten is in need of IMMEDIATE medical attention and will not survive without it, please follow the procedure below.

**A temperature over 103F or less than 98F**

**Trouble Breathing**

**Seizures**

**Severe lethargy/non-responsive**

**Evidence of severe pain: restlessness, vocalizing, panting**

**Major wounds requiring suture**

**Vomiting excessively (3-4 times)**

**Not urinating x 24 hours or more**

### **What to do In Case of Emergency**

*During regular AHS business hours (M-F, 8am-7pm, Sun., 8am-5pm) - Bring kitten directly to AHS for clinic staff to evaluate. There is no need to call first if it is an emergency.*

*During non-AHS business hours (M-F, 7pm-8am, Sun. after 5pm) – Take kitten to the following emergency clinic:*

Austin Vet Care Central Park

4106 N. Lamar Blvd.

Austin, TX 78756

(512) 459-4336

Let them know that you are fostering an Austin Humane Society animal. They will then call our on-call staff to approve care. This is for emergencies only. Non-emergent care will not be provided.

If you choose to take a foster animal to your own veterinarian or another emergency clinic, AHS will have to evaluate reimbursement on a case-by-case basis. **All non-emergent medical care should ONLY be provided by AHS Clinic staff and AHS Veterinarians.**

### **Medical issues requiring non-emergent veterinary attention:**

Discharge from eyes, nose

Coughing, Sneezing



Lack of appetite  
Lack of energy  
Diarrhea lasting more than 3 or 4 feedings  
Vomiting  
First sign of weight loss  
Limping  
Skin disease / wounds  
Not defecating for more than 2 days  
Any other sign of illness

Contact our foster care department to set up an appointment for the kitten to be evaluated or drop of the kitten in the morning for evaluation and pick up later. You may reach our foster care department at (512) 646-7387 ext. 102 or at [fostercare@austinhumanesociety.org](mailto:fostercare@austinhumanesociety.org)

## **Kitten Mortality**

Many factors play a part in kitten mortality, and death is an unfortunate reality when we deal with the most vulnerable populations. Kittens born on the streets are subjected to influences that can significantly reduce their chances of survival and may have congenital or inherited defects that we are unaware of. Despite our best efforts, young kittens do die.

The death of a kitten can be an emotionally disturbing experience. It is important to understand and accept that some kittens will not survive. What we can do for these kittens is surround them with warmth, care and love while they are with us.

## **Developmental Stages**

### ***At birth (3 - 4.5 ounces)***

- Kitten is born both blind and deaf.
- Eyes are closed and the ears are folded.
- Kitten uses its sense of smell to find its mother's teat.
- The mother has to lick the kitten's bottom to stimulate it to eliminate.
- A newborn kitten cannot regulate its own body temperature and it is extremely sensitive to cold.
- A newborn kitten that gets separated from the mother and its siblings can die quickly of hypothermia.



#### ***Day 4***

- Hearing develops but the ear canals are not open completely until the end of the 2nd week.

#### ***Day 5***

- Remains of the umbilical cord dry up and fall off

#### ***Day 11***

- Eyes begin to open and continue to open until the 13th day.
- All kittens are born with blue eyes but the eye color can change later.

#### ***2.5 weeks***

- Kitten begins to crawl and starts to stand.

#### ***3 weeks***

- Kitten is steadier on its feet
- Sense of smell is mature.
- Sight is still poor but he can interpret some visual information
- First **teeth** begin to break through gums.
- May eliminate without aid

#### ***4 weeks (~1 pound)***

- Kitten's sight has improved enough so that it can negotiate obstacles
- Starting to develop motor skills – running climbing
- Beginning to eat solid (canned) food
- Engaging in active play with littermates
- Kitten will not be fully sighted until 2 months of age

#### ***4 - 5 weeks***

- Kitten weighs about one pound and will be moving quite well
- Learning to play with one another and groom themselves



### ***5 to 7 weeks***

- Very important social development occurs in relation to humans and other animals. Fosters should provide a variety of socialization opportunities.

### ***8 weeks (~2 pounds)***

- Kitten will have a full set of teeth and should be fully weaned
- Kitten should be eating hard cat food as well as canned food
- Play should be highly active, chasing, climbing and tumbling with littermates

## **Caring for Already Weaned Kittens**

### **Supplies**

- Towels, wash cloths, blankets, unscented baby wipes
- Litter boxes and litter
- Canned and dry kitten food
- Bowls for food and water
- Scale
- Toys (cat food and water dishes, unscented bedding)
- Scratching Post(s)
- Heating pad (optional)

### **Getting Started**

We recommend using a “Starter Room” for the first several days (to a week, depending on the sociability of the kittens). This can be a bathroom, kitchen, spare room or even a large crate if you have one available. Young kittens have accidents so consider choosing an easily cleanable and disinfectable room as your “Starter Room”. Kittens should always have easy access to food, fresh water, and a litter box. Set up a warm soft place for them to sleep that is free of drafts. Make sure they have somewhere to hide that is easily accessible to you like a small crate or a cardboard box on its side. An inexpensive cardboard scratcher is a terrific way to get kittens used to scratching in appropriate places. The kittens should remain in their starter room while you are not available to supervise and overnight. While you are available to watch and play with the kittens, let them explore more and more parts of your home as the kittens become braver and braver. Separating the kittens from your own personal pets is a good idea. While the kittens are screened and evaluated before leaving the shelter, they could be incubating illnesses that are contagious to you or your pets. For the safety of your own pets, we recommend that foster animals not be allowed to mingle with your own pets.

### **Feeding**

Young kittens need to eat at least 3 to 4 times a day. Hard food can be left out all the time if it is in an area where other pets in the house do not have access to it – it is important to



make sure all kittens are eating regularly. Never give foster kittens cow's milk, as they cannot digest it. If the kittens do not seem to be eating, try warming up and watering down soft food. You can use commercially produced kitten formula to add calories to wet food. For picky eaters, you can also try canned tuna, chicken or salmon or meat flavored baby food to encourage them to eat. Remember that none of these are balanced diets for kittens and should not be fed long term as the primary diet. If the kittens are not eating, please bring them to AHS so that our clinic team can evaluate them

## Eliminating

Most kittens are very eager to go to the bathroom in a litter box. Make sure the litter box has low sides to make it easy for them to get in and out.. Non-clumping, pelleted litter is recommended, since kittens sometimes eat their litter. Using a litter box is instinctual, but you may need to encourage young kittens to use the box or offer several boxes if a kitten is not catching on as quickly as expected. The size of the box, the type of litter, and any musculoskeletal or gastrointestinal illness may affect the kitten's ability to use the box. If you catch your kitten having an accident outside of the box, never startle or punish the kitten. Doing so will likely teach your kitten to eliminate when you are not around, but punishment will not convince him to use the litter box. Continue to encourage and reward using the litter box. When accidents occur, avoid scolding and clean the mess quickly.

## Socialization

Kittens are in your home for a reason – SOCIALIZATION!!! Handle them several times a day and especially while they are eating. As they become more acclimated to your home, you can carefully let them explore more areas while you are available to supervise. Help them learn appropriate ways to play and appropriate things to play with – not your fingers! Rough play (scratching and biting) should NOT be encouraged. If a kitten does become over stimulated, give the kitten an old stuffed toy he can sink his teeth into and kick as much as he likes, but teach them that it is not appropriate to do this to any part of a human's body! There are so many fabulous toys designed for cats – wand toys, laser pointers, balls and stuffed mice are all appreciated. Be careful with any sort of string – kittens can ingest it, potentially causing serious bowel obstructions.

**Get them used to all over handling – check their paws, ears and teeth regularly. Introduce them to brushing, ear cleaning and nail clipping.**

This is also a great time to introduce the concept of the scratching post, if they go for the furniture, feel free to squirt them with a water bottle and then move them to the scratching post – the kitten's new owner will appreciate it! Try "Squirt Therapy" when a kitten does anything "bad" – tries to get outside, plays too rough, scratches on the furniture, etc.

## Kitten Growth and Development

Kittens should follow the growth chart below. Of course there will always be slight variations, but generally kittens should weigh 1 pound at 1 month of age, 2 pounds by 2 months of age, and so on until about 5 months of age.

The kitten needs to be at least two pounds for spay/neuter surgery. Occasionally we encounter kittens of smaller stature that despite our best efforts, do not reach 2 pounds as soon as we were



hoping. These kittens may need to remain in foster until they reach the minimum adoptable weight.

## Trouble Shooting for Fostering Cats and Kittens

When fostering young kittens, daily monitoring of their overall health and well-being is very important. Some of the most common issues you may have are outlined below. If the suggested remedies below do not help, please bring the kitten to AHS for evaluation.

### Tummy Troubles

Tummy Troubles include not eating, diarrhea, vomiting, blood in stool, and not using the litter boxes. The most common causes of Tummy Troubles are diet, intestinal parasites, or bacterial overgrowth in the intestine.

### Not Eating

Young animals that have been separated from their mothers too soon often lack the instinct to eat from a bowl and need some encouragement.

- Watering food down, heating it up, and offering it directly to their lips with your finger or a spoon can sometimes give them the idea. *Kittens at or under one pound need to be encouraged to eat at least every four hours and weighed daily to ensure weight gain.*
- If the kittens do not seem interested in regular cat food, try canned chicken or tuna or meat flavored baby food to entice them. Pouring the liquid from canned chicken or tuna onto other types of food will often work. Add more water to the can, refrigerate it and you'll have more "juice" ready for next time. Remember that supplements like tuna or baby food are not balanced diets and should not be used long term as replacements for kitten food.

### Diarrhea

Loose, watery stools are very common in young kittens. The most common causes are diet, intestinal parasites, or bacterial overgrowth. Very watery diarrhea for more than 24 hours can be an emergency situation for a very small kitten. Make sure the kitten is drinking and bring the kitten to AHS for evaluation if the diarrhea persists or if the kitten is lethargic, vomiting, or not eating.

### Feline Upper Respiratory Infection (URI)

URI is similar to the common cold in humans. Most respiratory infections are caused by viruses, so treatment generally consists of supportive care. Antibiotics are sometimes given to treat secondary bacterial infections.

#### What are the signs of URI?

- Clear or colored nasal discharge (snot)
- Sneezing





- Red inflamed conjunctiva (lining of the eyes)
- Fever, lethargy, loss of appetite

### **What can I do to make my foster cat feel better?**

- Make sure the cat is eating. When cats get stuffy noses, they can't smell their food very well and may not want to eat. Offer canned food, canned chicken, tuna or salmon, or meat flavored baby food. Remember that canned meats and baby foods are not balanced diets for cats and should not replace cat food for more than a few meals.
- If the cat is producing discharge from eyes or nose, gently clean the cat's nose and eyes with a soft cloth wet with warm water.
- If the cat is very congested, use a humidifier or put the cat in a small bathroom and run hot water in the shower for 15-20 minutes a couple of times a day. For a more concentrated steam treatment, put the cat in a carrier next to the sink, cover the carrier and the faucet with a thick towel and run the water on hot for 15-20 minutes. The steam should remain trapped under the towel.

### **Hair Loss**

Any spots of hair loss on your foster should be reported to the Foster Coordinator immediately. The most common cause of hair loss in cats is a skin fungus called ringworm. Testing is required to diagnose ringworm, since many causes of hair loss lead to similar symptoms. Ringworm is treatable, and our Foster Care Coordinator can speak with you about treatment options. Ringworm is contagious to other pets and is zoonotic, meaning that it is contagious to people. Cats or kittens with hair loss should be handled with gloves or other protective clothing and kept strictly isolated from other fosters or pets.

### **Behavior Problems**

Most kittens adjust very quickly and easily to live in their new foster home. After a few days of caution and a few hisses and swats, the majority of kittens become outgoing, playful and affectionate. If after a few days, the kitten does not seem to be coming out of her shell, more proactive care must be taken.

### **Socializing Shy Kittens**

- Food is the key to taming. Make dry kitten food available at all times and give the kitten a small amount of wet food at least twice a day. The kitten may hesitate to eat in your presence at first, but be patient. Eventually the kitten will associate your presence with food.
- Chicken-flavored baby food is a special treat that almost no kitten can resist (make sure it doesn't contain onion!). Baby food should not replace kitten food as the primary diet, since it is not well balanced for kittens.
- Wrap the kitten in a towel, allowing her head to stick out. Offer baby food or wet food on a spoon. If she does not respond, dab a tiny bit on the end of her nose. Once she tastes it, she will soon want more.



- Gently begin to pet the kitten's face, chin, and behind the ears while talking gently. Try to have several feeding/petting sessions (5-10 minutes) with each kitten as many times a day as you can.
- Progress will depend on the kitten's age and temperament. Each day you will notice improvement- falling asleep in your lap, coming towards you for food, meowing at you, purring, and playing are all great signs. Once the kitten no longer runs away from you but instead comes toward you seeking to be fed, held and petted, you can confine her to a small, kitten-proofed room rather than a cage.
- Expose the kittens to a variety of people. Everyone should use soft voices at first, and approach the kittens in a non-threatening manner.
- If you do not notice signs of taming after a couple of days, kittens should be separated from each other to facilitate taming. Left together, one kitten can become outgoing and playful while another remains shy and withdrawn. If you cannot separate them, the kittens can be housed together, but be sure to spend time alone with each one. Siblings can be reunited when they have begun to show regular signs of socialization.
- Once the kitten is willing to play, offer toys and use a string (not yarn) or a cat dancer for him to chase. Do not let the kitten bite, scratch, or play with your hand.
- If the kittens are staying awake at night, try to play and socialize with them more during the day and cover their cage(s) at night with a towel or blanket.
- Leave a television or radio on (not too loud) during the day so the kittens get used to human voices.
- If you are confining the kittens in a kennel, try to keep it in the most active part of your house (family room, kitchen, etc.) This way, the kittens can get used to the regular noises and activities of a household, which will help with socialization.

### **Rough Play**

- Provide a variety of toys for your kittens so you can determine their preferences. In general, cats seem to enjoy batting at small toys, like balls and fake mice. They also like to stalk, chase and pounce on things that move like prey, such as toys with feathers attached to flexible rods that you can dangle and move about.
- Frequently give your kittens new objects to investigate, such as paper bags or cardboard boxes.
- If your kittens tend to grab your feet as you go up and down the stairs or hide under things and ambush your ankles or legs as you walk by, carry toys with you and toss them ahead of you to redirect his attention. Try to get him to focus on chasing the toys instead of attacking you.
- Consistently give a too rough kitten “time-outs” when he plays too roughly. The instant he starts to bite or scratch you, end the game by leaving the room. Don’t attempt to pick up your cat and put him in another room for the time-out as this could provoke more bites.



### **What NOT to Do:**

- Never encourage your kitten to play with your hands, feet or any other body part. While it may be fun when you have a tiny kitten, it becomes painful and dangerous as the kitten grows up.
- Do not use toys that teach your cat to play with your hands, such as gloves with balls hanging from the fingers. If you do, your cat will be encouraged to direct his play at your hands and won't understand that it's only okay to attack your hands when you're wearing the toy gloves.
- Do not physically punish your cat for rough play. If you hit or slap your cat, he may perceive your actions as play and become even rougher. Alternatively, he might become fearful of your hands and respond by avoiding you or changing from play to real aggression.
- Never run from your cat or try to block his movements with your feet. These actions can cause your cat to intensify his play or become aggressive.

### **Destructive Scratching**

Scratching is a normal cat behavior intended to sharpen the toenails for climbing and defense. The best tactic when dealing with inappropriate scratching is not to try to stop your cat from scratching, but instead to teach her where and what to scratch. An excellent approach is to provide her with appropriate, cat-attractive surfaces and objects to scratch, such as scratching posts. The following steps will help you encourage your cat to scratch where you want her to.

- Provide a variety of scratching posts with different qualities and surfaces. Try posts made of cardboard, carpeting, wood, sisal and upholstery. Some cats prefer horizontal posts. Others like vertical posts or slanted posts. Some prefer a vertical grain for raking, while others favor a horizontal grain for picking. Once you figure out your cat's preference for scratching, provide additional posts of that kind in various locations. Keep in mind that all cats want a sturdy post that won't shift or collapse when used. Most cats also like a post that's tall enough that they can stretch fully. (This may be why cats seem to like drapes so much!)
- Encourage your cat to investigate her posts by scenting them with catnip, hanging toys on them and placing them in areas where she'll be inclined to climb on them.
- Discourage inappropriate scratching by removing or covering other desirable objects. Turn speakers toward the wall. Put plastic, double-sided sticky tape, sandpaper or upside-down vinyl carpet runner (knobby parts up) on furniture or on the floor where your cat would stand to scratch your furniture. Place scratching posts next to these objects, as "legal" alternatives.
- If you catch your cat *in the act* of scratching an inappropriate object, you can try startling him by clapping your hands or squirting him with water. Use this procedure only as a last resort, because your cat may associate you with the startling event (clapping or squirting) and learn to scratch only when you are not around.