



# Kitten Bottle Feeding Guide

## Preparing Formula

Foster Caregivers must only use the provided, approved, kitten formula.

1. Add one part powder to 2 parts warm water (100°F) using the clean scoop provided to you.
  - Using tap water is acceptable, but if your household water supply has a high chlorine or mineral content it may be preferable to use filtered water (home filtered or store-bought). If store-bought, ensure it is safe for drinking (e.g., not distilled).
2. Mix until well blended with no lumps.
3. Mixed formula must be refrigerated and used within 24 hours.
  - Please label all containers of mixed formula with the date/time the formula was made and discard any formula older than 24 hours.
  - You may wish to prepare enough for one full day's feeding to keep in the refrigerator for use; remember to discard any excess that is not used.
4. Place bottles into a warming source to maintain their temperature until feeding. Milk should be around the same temperature as your skin.
5. For bottle warming, do not heat the actual bottle.
  - Use hot water in a container, rest bottle in it and continuously dip/warm during feeding sessions.
  - Test on your wrist by feeling the bottle; make sure it's not too hot.

## Positioning Kittens for Feeding

This step is very important and is where the crucial surrogate bonding happens. Kittens are most comfortable in a position similar to the one they'd be in if they were nursing from a mom cat. Never cradle them on their backs, like one would a human baby. The on-the-stomach position prevents formula food from entering the windpipe which causes aspiration pneumonia.



## ASPCA Approved Bottle-Feeding Techniques

- Sanitize hands.
- Place kitten (one at a time) on a stable surface, covered with a soft towel or bedding, and a clean wee-wee pad.
  - It may be beneficial to warm up the towel/bedding (in a dryer or microwave) so that it is warm to the touch but not hot, before placing the kitten on it for feeding.
- Open the mouth gently with the tip of your finger and slip the bottle nipple in. Once your kitten gets comfortable with the bottle, they will search out the nipple enthusiastically. You will feel a “vacuum effect” when the kitten gets into suckle mode. If the kitten is suckling, you will see the ears pulsing back and forth with each swallow as the mouth creates a vacuum around the bottle.
- To keep air from getting into the kitten’s stomach, hold the bottle at a 45-degree angle, keeping a light pull on the bottle.
  - Keep the kitten comfortable and ensure they don’t strain their necks too much while nursing.
  - If a kitten refuses to take the nipple or won’t suckle, stop offering the bottle. Try massaging them on their forehead and stroking their back. Take a new toothbrush and stroke the kitten’s back with it. This replicates the activity of a mother cat’s cleaning and can effectively stimulate a kitten to nurse.
  - Is the kitten cold when you handle them? If they are, please place them on the heating source and alert foster staff. A hypothermic kitten will show no interest in bottle-feeding. If after- hours, please contact the foster program’s emergency or after-hours contact for guidance.
  - Sometimes kittens will not latch if their belly is already full. If this may be the case, you can attempt to assist with elimination (see Stimulating section) before offering the bottle.
  - Is the bottle too cool? Kittens may not latch if this is the case; warm the bottle between feedings so that the milk is the temperature of your skin.
  - Sometimes kittens are picky or have trouble latching the first time; it is a learning process for them to drink from a bottle. If a kitten persistently refuses to drink after several attempts, please alert foster staff. If after hours, please contact the foster program’s emergency or after-hours contact for guidance.
- When a kitten has had enough formula, they will usually unlatch from the nipple on their own, and their tummy will be very rounded, almost pear-shaped.
  - When bottle feeding is complete, bottles must be washed and sanitized.
- When bottle-feeding, remember not to:
  - Overfill the bottles and waste milk.
  - Squeeze the bottle; this may cause milk to flood into the kitten’s mouth.
  - Force-feed milk or water; young kittens do not have a gag reflex.
  - Feed kitten vertically, standing up, on or on their backs.
  - Feed milk that is too hot. (It should be the temperature of your skin.)
  - Be impatient.

**IMPORTANT:** When a kitten gets milk in their lung, it’s called aspiration, which can cause life-threatening pneumonia. People have been known to accidentally force formula into the lungs of the kitten by squeezing the bottle while the nipple is in the kitten’s mouth. Another cause of aspiration can be if the nipple hole is too large. Alert foster staff or contact the Emergency Hotline (if after hours) immediately if you believe aspiration has happened. Symptoms of aspiration include milk coming out of the nose, sneezing, and increased respiratory effort.

## Feeding Process

A typical, successful feeding session may take about 5-10 minutes, per kitten.

- Record the date and time the kitten begins feeding. (For accuracy, if you are fostering a litter, record the time before each individual kitten, rather than one time for the group.)
- Track and log feedings and eliminations in your health monitoring log. If stable, consistent habits develop, report “normal” routine updates on a weekly basis. Report any abnormal or behavior concerns immediately.
- Offer the nipple to the kitten. Once they latch on, let them eat as much as they want.
- Expect the kitten to eat the same amount or slightly more at subsequent feeding sessions. A kitten should not eat more than double their stomach capacity (see chart), but in general a kitten will not overeat.
- If one or more kittens did not consume appropriate amounts on the first attempt, please feed the rest of the litter and re-try feeding the under-eaters again.

Weight (grams)	Stomach Capacity(ml)
100	4
150	6
200	8
250	10
300	12
350	14
400	16

## Feeding Completion and Wrap-up

- Repeat all steps until all kittens in the litter are fed.
- Assist all kittens with elimination after feeding. (See Stimulating section.)
- Clean all kittens’ faces and bodies with clean, warm, damp gauze or washcloth. Ensure they are not wet, just clean.
- Discard any unused formula in the bottles and thoroughly disinfect all parts.
  - Do not place bottles or nipples in a dishwasher – hand wash only.
  - Using hot water and dish soap, use the small bottle brush to fully clean the inside of the bottle(s) and the nipple(s).
  - Rinse very thoroughly to ensure there is no soap or milk residue in the bottle(s) or nipple(s); this prevents the development of bacteria, which could be harmful to your foster kitten.
  - Air dry between feedings.



## Stimulating

Kittens this age do not know how to urinate or defecate on their own. It is natural for mother cats to lick the back end of their babies to stimulate the bowels and bladder. Since our bottle feeder kittens are not with their mother, foster caregivers must assist with this before and after every feeding session.

- Before and after feeding the kitten, gently rub a warm, damp cotton ball or cloth on their genital and anal areas using a front-to-back motion with gentle pressure until they eliminate. You may also employ a gentle “tapping” technique.
- Once the kitten has finished eliminating, stop rubbing. Overstimulation will irritate the area. Be mindful to watch for and avoid any chafing.
- Kittens should urinate at every feeding, and almost always during stimulation. If a kitten has not urinated in a 12-hour period, or for 2 bottle feedings, alert foster staff right away.
- Kittens should defecate about once a day. It may take a couple of feedings to see results, so don't despair if the kitten doesn't defecate right away. If a kitten has not defecated in 2 days, alert foster staff right away, as they may be constipated.
- Always record your kitten(s)' elimination on a health monitoring log.



## Temperature Regulation

Kittens this small are unable to regulate their body temperature on their own. To help keep them warm, use a heating disc or hot water bottle to provide proper heat support. To heat the disc, microwave for 5 minutes and it should last for 6-8 hours. Always wrap the disc with a wee-wee pad or blanket. If a kitten touches the disc unwrapped, it could potentially burn their paw pads. If you don't have a microwave, you can use a hot water bottle.

## Important to Note

Kittens that are not consuming the correct amount of nutrition as outlined in your Kitten Foster Feeding Instructions are likely to become underweight, lethargic, and dehydrated, which could result in death. Foster Caregivers must closely monitor the kittens in their care. Always alert foster staff if an animal's eating habits change.

Some kittens will not latch onto the bottle. Kittens rely heavily on scent and instinct – and a mother – to guide them. Always attempt to let the kitten eat on their own from a bottle first; if a kitten is not eating enough on its own, or is not eating at all, please alert foster staff. If after hours, please contact the foster program's emergency or after-hours contact for guidance.