

Taking care of your Litter of Kittens

A lot of people like to have a litter of kittens, they are fun to see and so playful! But how to take care of them?

Mum will be the best caretaker of the kittens for sure, she feeds them with her milk, cleans them, and learns them to be "cat".

Right after birth

After the kittens are born, it is good to weigh every kitten. They should be between 90-120 grams (males usually are a bit heavier than females)

Drinking Milk

After birth it is very important that the kittens start drinking mum's milk straight away. The first milk contains antibodies, this will help them to fight off several infections during the first few weeks. These antibodies will pass the intestinal wall of the kitten and will go to the blood of the kitten. This can only happen during the first few hours of their life, so it is very important that they drink. Besides the antibodies they of course have to drink to get energy into their bodies. They have no energy reserves like mother does. Kittens that not drink will quickly drop in temperature, get dehydrated and will soon die of exhaustion.

The environment

Kittens cannot yet keep their temperature themselves very well, so the surroundings should be warm (32-34 degrees Celsius in the nest, 24-27 in the room) and without draught. The kittens really need the body-warmth of their mother, brothers and sisters to stay warm enough. And of course, the surroundings should be clean.



The first few weeks of life...

Weighing

It is good to weigh the kittens every day, to keep track of their daily intake of milk. If they get too little, the kitten will not grow, so by weighing the kittens, you quickly know if all goes well with mum and the kittens. If you keep a dairy, you can quickly spot the changes and get help in an early stage.



As drinking milk and producing stool and urine may influence the weight of the kitten a lot, it is good to weigh the kittens at the same time every day to get a more accurate record. Preferably use an exact kitchen scale.

Calculate the average weekly gain in weight, this is more accurate than daily measurements.

Checking milk-intake

A kitten needs to drink enough milk to keep his/her body-temperature right, to stay healthy and to grow. Sometimes a kitten can drink too little, for example because the kitten is ill, or maybe the mother does not produce enough milk. This is why it is important to keep record of the kitten's weight, and if mum allows them to drink. Signs that may indicate something is the matter:

- After drinking the kittens should sleep soundly
- After drinking the kitten should have a filled (round) belly
- If they keep miauwing and moving around, this might be because they are (still) hungry
- You can weigh such a kitten before drinking and after to see how much it drank.

Check the stool

Until a kitten is 21 days old, the kitten can not stool or urinate by itself, the mother will stimulate it to do so. So if you have to raise a kitten yourself because the mother died, you should be aware of this. In this case a warm, moist piece of cotton after a feeding may do the trick, by rubbing it against the belly and anus of the kitten.

Check the stool, diarrhea can have several origins, but as they quickly get dehydrated, it should always be treated. (call your vet for help)

Overview of the care needed by kittens the first few weeks of life:

	Daily growth	Temperature immediate surroundings	Veterinary care		Hear, See, Play		Teeth and Food
Week 1	First day they may lose 10-13 gram	32-34 °C					
Week 2	10-13 gram/day	27-29 °C			Eyes open day 5-14	Standing up: day 10	First teeth get through
Week 3	10-13 gram/day	24-27 °C	Deworm		Ears open day 6-14		Making stool by itself
Week 4		24°C				Climbing: day 22-40	Extra food needed
Week 5							Extra Kitten wetfood/dryfood softened in water
Week 6			Deworm + deflea				Extra Kitten wetfood/dryfood softened in water
Week 7							No more mother's milk
Week 8				1 st vaccin			
Week 9							All milk teeth are present
Week 10			Deworm + deflea	2 nd vaccin			
Week 11							
Week 12				3 rd vaccin			Start to change milk teeth for adult teeth
Week 16				Booster vaccin			

To a new owner

In principle, a kitten can be separated from its mum when it is eating dry/wet food, and does not need the mother's milk anymore. This is when all milk-teeth are present. So from about 8-9 weeks of age. But it is much better to leave the kittens with the mother longer, as socialization will be better than, and there will be less behavioral and physical/health problems (like getting fungus on an early age).