



FRIENDS FOR LIFE

## HOW TO CARE FOR NEW BORN PUPPIES AND KITTENS



The SPCA often receives motherless new born or very young (under 4 weeks) stray puppies and kittens. The number is greater for kittens as cats breed up to four times a year, whereas dogs give birth to two litters a year.

The SPCA would prefer not to take in such young animals and tries to persuade members of the public who have found them, to keep them, take care of them and re-home them (the SPCA does not keep newborns for adoption) because chances are the animals will not survive for long in a shelter atmosphere.

**Why? You may ask.** Puppies and kittens under four weeks of age require round-the-clock feeding (every three to four hours) and need specialised care. They do not have the anti-bodies from their mother's milk to protect them from falling sick and keeping them in a shelter facility subjects them to being exposed to viruses which may be present in other animals that arrive through our doors.

This is why the SPCA does not generally keep most animals under three weeks, because their chances of survival are slim – even within a 24-hour period, a seemingly healthy kitten could fall sick due to stress and other factors.

### Caring for puppies and kittens from new born to four weeks

First, if you have found a stray kitten/s or puppy/s with its eyes not yet open, chances are it is not yet two weeks old (usually their eyes will open at two weeks). If you can keep it with a view to having it as pet, or finding a home, we thank you for helping to reduce the number of strays coming in to the SPCA.

We provide a few guidelines/tips below for those who are committed to helping us save lives by taking responsibility for feeding and caring for stray puppies/kittens that they have found. You may be experienced already and have successfully raised these animals, but for those who are new at it, we hope that the following will be helpful.

### Keep them warm

As they do not have the warmth of their mother to nestle up to, you must provide a box/container with warm bedding (e.g. blanket/towel) and preferably a warm hot water bottle (if you do not have one which you can buy from a pharmacy, you can substitute with a normal water bottle filled with warm water) wrapped up in a towel. A reading lamp can also provide warmth but you should keep it at a distance from the animal in case it gets too warm – the pet should be able to move away from the light if need be. The container should be kept in at natural room temperature (not air-conditioned) and away from fans/drafts.





### Feeding

Feeding of very young animals can be done with a syringe (available at pharmacies) or bottle.

### What to feed?

Milk powder Animalac is available from pet shops or a cheaper alternative is Carnation Evaporated Milk – one parts milk to one part water.

### When to feed?

Generally kittens/puppies that have not yet opened their eyes will have to be fed every three hours. They will usually wake up from sleep and cry (like babies do) when they are hungry. As they get older week by week (3 to 4 weeks) the intervals can be increased e.g. at four weeks they can be fed – four to five hourly.

### Amount to feed?

Although bottles are may be preferred by some, the hole where they suckle must not be clogged with milk, otherwise the animals will be sucking air into their system which could become life threatening. With bottle feeding also, the animals go at their own pace which means that feeding could take you quite a long time, especially if there are four or more in the litter. Syringe feeding should be done from the side of the mouth (not in the middle) to ensure that the milk goes down the right way, otherwise it could go down into the air passage. With syringe feeding you can feed around two to three ml per feed – the best gauge if the animal has had enough – it will turn its head away and refuse to drink anymore when you try to put the syringe/bottle into its mouth.



You will need to hold the young animal by the scruff of their neck on their back (see picture) whilst putting the syringe/bottle into the mouth. If you do not have control or are not firm in your control, it will make things more uncomfortable for the animals, and the feeding session will probably take twice as long. The animal may not receive the desired amount either, if you spend too much time fussing! Having said that – everyone is new at this in the beginning, and practise makes perfect. You may face resistance because the animals are not used to this initially and will struggle around – the firmer and more confidently you hold them though, the faster they will adapt, and the faster you can get food to the hungry!

The more efficiently you can complete the feeding session, the faster the animal can go back to slumber land after it pees etc. (it is advisable not to play too much with the very young, as they need to eat and have a restful sleep).

### Toilet Time!

Once you have fed the animal you have to get a piece of cotton wool, dampen it and rub it along its stomach towards the rear end areas so as to stimulate it to urinate/defecate. Normally a mother dog or cat will lick its newborn to aid it to do these things, but in the absence of their mother, you must be the one to take charge of this duty. If the stool is watery and persists, consult a vet as soon as possible. If stool is soft, this is normal.

### Cleaning up

It is important to clean up any milky messes (usually around their mouth area), or any 'toilet mess' before you put the animals on their warm bedding to sleep.

### Weaning

Kittens and puppies that are raised by humans from very young, generally can be weaned earlier – at 4 to 5 weeks old, they can be fed solids – e.g. cereal with milk or canned food mixed with water. Again, this will be a messy process and should be done on newspaper. You should place the mix in a shallow solid dish and lead the animal to the food – initially they may not be in the know, so you may need to dip your finger into the food and place it within licking reach so that they know this is their food. It does not take long for them to pick up the scent and the taste. Meals should be fed regularly at same intervals. E.g. 7am, 12pm, 5pm, 10pm.



### Health Check

If you are keeping the animal as a pet, or finding it a home, do take it for a veterinary check at a clinic in your area. It is advisable to take the animal/s for de-worming at around five weeks of age. Vaccinations against major feline/canine diseases will need to be done at around eight weeks of age.

