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## ORPHANED KITTENS

Spring is once again upon us, and this is the season for little kittens to be born. I get many calls from kind hearted souls who find stray litters of kittens apparently orphaned by their mothers. Attempting to hand raise these kittens can be very time consuming and frustrating, but can also be very rewarding. Even with the best skills and love, not all kittens will make it. This article is for those brave souls who are willing to try. Here are some tips that will hopefully increase your chances of success. The information is broken down into two headings, feeding and housing.

**FEEDING:** The first choice in raising orphaned kittens is to transfer them to another mother who has young of a similar age. Often she will be able to increase her milk production to assist in feeding the kittens, and to provide the maternal contact that is so important to the proper development of the kitten. Unfortunately, this is rarely possible.

The best milk replacer is a commercially prepared product that will most closely match the contents of cats milk. These include KMR and Havolac brand milk replacers available at most veterinary hospitals and pet stores. A homemade formula can be created by blending 0.5 cups whole milk, 1 egg yolk, 1 drop multiple infant vitamins and 3 Tums tablets (500mg / tab). Follow the feeding guide on the milk replacer can, which will ensure the proper increase in amount fed with increase in body weight. Most kittens weigh between 90 and 110 grams at birth and should gain between 50 and 100 grams per week.

Orphan kittens should be fed four times per day, using a feeding bottle and nipple, available where milk replacer is sold. When done suckling, the abdomen will be enlarged but not distended. It is better to underfeed for the first several days and gradually increase to recommended amounts. Always warm the formula before feeding and clean the bottle and nipple thoroughly between feedings. Never squeeze milk out of the bottle while the nipple is in the mouth, as this may result in aspiration pneumonia and death.

During the first few weeks of life, after each feeding, burp the kitten just like a human infant, and swab the genital area with a warm moistened cotton ball or Q-tip to stimulate defecation and urination. If the kittens seem to be crying excessively, they may be hungry, cold or both. Begin weaning the kittens from the formula at 3 weeks of age, and start on solid food and lapping milk or water from a bowl.

**HOUSING:** Proper housing for kittens can be created with objects already around the house. A cardboard box works very well. Place a thermostatically controlled heating pad over one half of the bottom of the box and up one side (which allows the animal to seek

heat if cold and escape heat if too warm). Over the heating pad, place a water proof covering and then cover with old towels or blankets. Keep the bedding meticulously clean.

Newborn kittens have a difficult time maintaining normal body temperature and do not gain full control until one month old. Try to maintain a temperature of 86°F for the first week of life, 80°F for the second and third weeks and 75°F for the fourth and fifth weeks.

One of the most frustrating things about raising orphaned kittens is that some do not end up being good pets. The artificial upbringing and lack of contact with their mother and littermates may result in psychological problems. Normal curiosity may be stunted and kittens may be passive to physical restraint, show self-aggression and lack appropriate social responses to other animals. Orphaned kittens usually turn out the best if they can be transferred to another mother with young of a similar age. The second best choice would be to hand raise the orphans leaving the litter as intact as possible. The most undesirable arrangement is to raise the orphan alone without other animals or people.