

Second Chance  
Animal Rescue  
Neonatal Foster  
Care Basics

2021



**Together We  
Can Save More  
Lives**

Welcome and thank you for opening your heart and your home to some of SCAR's most precious and delicate animals. In our Neonatal Foster Care program, you may find yourself fostering pregnant mums, mums who have just given birth and her kittens, a litter of orphaned kittens or one or two orphaned kittens. In this information package we will provide you with the basic information on what you need to know, what you have to do and what you need to be on the lookout for to ensure healthy mummy and babies throughout the whole process.

Throughout your neonatal foster care journey, you will have our entire foster team behind you. We are ready and able to answer all questions and enquiries regarding your little furry friends. We strongly promote asking any questions that you may have simply asking the question could be lifesaving.

NON-EMERGENCY questions can be sent through anytime to our foster team via email at: [foster@secondchanceanimalrescue.com.au](mailto:foster@secondchanceanimalrescue.com.au)

NON-EMERGENCY MEDICAL questions can also be sent through via email, but we commend calling us at our shelter during business hours or calling the foster care coordinators direct line.

SHELTER: 03 9357 0834

FOSTER PHONE: 0435 807 217

MEDICAL EMERGENCIES you are to contact us via phone as soon as possible, day or night.

FOSTER PHONE: 0435 807 217

SECONDARY EMERGENCY LINE: 0421 418 448

A medical emergency FOR KITTENS could be ANY of the following: head slumped/body limp/unable to rouse (Potential Fading Kitten Syndrome), diarrhoea that is very runny, white, bloody, or black, any rapid weight loss, mouth breathing, heavy/laboured breathing, red/brown urine, vomiting and diarrhoea together or within a short time frame, seizures.

A medical emergency FOR MUMS could be ANY of the following: difficulty breathing, not eating/eating very little, excessive bleeding or discharge during or after birth, if the mum suddenly becomes very weak, vomiting and diarrhoea together or within a short timeframe, seizures, fever.

Any injuries sustained while in foster care also warrant a call to the medical hotline!

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### **Bringing Home a Pregnant Mum**

Thank you so much for fostering a pregnant mum, this is about to be one of the most memorable, magical and educational experiences you will have. Please read the following outline on what to expect during the pregnancy and what you will need to do to prepare for delivery.

#### What you will need:

- A box or tub large enough for mamma to lie down and stretch out, such as an under-the-bed plastic storage tote. Mamma should be able to get in and out easily; but kittens should not be able to get out.
- Electric heating pad or wheat pad
- High quality canned kitten food for mum (and to wean babies)
- Hard kitten food (kibble) for mum (and to wean babies)
- Bottle kit with nipples in case kittens need supplementary feeding

- Powdered formula in case kittens need supplementary feeding
- Empty room/bathroom/large closet to isolate mum and kittens
- Digital scale that weighs in grams
- Litter box and non-clumping litter
- Secure pet carrier for transportation

We, of course, aim to provide you with everything that you will need to keep mum and babies happy and healthy, but you must ensure that you are doing your part as well.

A couple of weeks before your cat is due to deliver, you need to prepare a “nesting box” –a safe, quiet and secure place for mama to deliver and care for her kittens. Mamma cat should be introduced to this area to get used to her surroundings for awhile so she feels safe and secure for the birth.

\*Do not be alarmed if a couple of weeks leading up to her kittens’ birth, mamma cat might exhibit some strange and/or uncharacteristic behaviour – some cats may become extremely affectionate, while others might become aggressive or fearful. Just remember that mamma’s hormones are raging during this time, so any out of the ordinary behaviour is generally no cause for concern.

Pregnant cats should eat up to 4 times their normal amount of food and should be eating kitten food for the duration of their pregnancy and while nursing kittens.

#### Setting up a nesting box:

- There are many options for nesting boxes. You will need a box that’s wide enough to accommodate a heating pad on one side, while leaving room for mamma to nurse on the other side without lying on the heating pad.
- Line a box with blankets or towels. The box should be high enough off the ground so that mamma can get in and out easily, but her kittens cannot – 8-12 inches tall or somewhere around this height is ideal.
- You can offer more than one option with blankets in one corner and a box in another area.
- You can place mamma cat with her nesting box in a bathroom or small room with some light.
- Have heating pad only under blankets on one side of the box – your mamma cat maybe too warm if she has no other place to cool off.

\*Note: Your mamma cat may ignore the box until it is time for labour. If this is the case, just put her in it when the kittens are coming. She will usually take to it just fine!\*

#### Labour

Several hours (and perhaps a whole day) of restlessness, grooming, nesting, pacing, panting, and crying indicates that labour has begun. Mamma cat may purr during labour and when feeding her new kittens. When labour begins, there will be some brownish fluids, and a small amount of blood. Babies can be born head first or feet first (breach), and will be delivered in a thin amniotic sack, which usually breaks during birth.

As soon as the kitten emerges from mamma’s birth canal, she should immediately bite/pierce the sack, and begins cleaning the kitten to encourage him/her to breathe. If she does not do this, you will need to step in and break the sack, as the kitten is at risk of suffocating. Wipe away the mucus and amniotic casing from the kitten’s mouth and nose – once you do this, the kitten should cry out! At this point, the kitten is still attached to the placenta, which will be passed within a few minutes. Once the placenta is passed, the mother will bite the umbilical cord to cut it. Sometimes mamma can take a while to bite the cord, especially if other kittens are already out and nursing, so feel free to help her by tying the cord with string/floss and cutting it with a pair of sterile scissors. Usually, the mother will then eat the placenta.

Kittens are usually born every 10 minutes to 1 hour. If mamma is having contractions for longer than 2 hours in between kittens, this could mean that a baby is stuck in the birth canal, which can be deadly for mamma and all remaining kittens in-utero. If this happens, you need to call the appropriate emergency number immediately, as mamma may need veterinary intervention!

Some mamma cats prefer to give birth in a dark, quiet place, far away from human contact, while others prefer to have their human right beside them, giving pats and soothing them through this difficult process! She will generally let you know what she would like –just pay attention to her body language. Once kittens are born and mamma is nursing, she may like some food, which can be placed near her head, so she can eat without disrupting the kittens.

\*\* If any kitten is stillborn (this is quite common), remove it from the nesting box as soon as possible. Wrap the little one in a cloth and bring him/her into our shelter for burial.

### **The Babies are here, the Babies are here!!**

Congratulations!! Your beautiful mamma cat has had her tiny little babies, now the real fun begins. What on earth do you do now? There are a few extremely important things that need to be monitored regularly and accurately, these are: WEIGHT, WEIGHT and WEIGHT, along with keeping the kittens warm, how often they are feeding and if they are toileting. In this section we will go through how to monitor all these things accurately and successfully.

Kittens generally weigh between 90-110 grams when they are born. Any kitten born smaller than 70 grams is at serious risk of fading away and will likely need intervention – which we will touch on later in this section. Please understand that if a kitten is born weighing under 65 grams, there is often not much we can do; this is not your fault! While it may be hard to witness, this unfortunately a natural part of a mother cat giving birth. \*\*If the kittens are still with the mum wait a day or two and then proceed to weigh the kittens daily. If mum is nursing the kittens please handle them minimally during the first week unless you are weighing them. After this time a slow increase in gentle handling may occur\*\*

During the next few weeks, you want to make sure that mamma cat is eating 3 or 4 meals a day of kitten food. She needs all the strength and nutrients that she can get to keep feeding her little ones.

### **Taking care of Orphaned Kittens**

There is always a chance that your mamma cat disowns one or all of her kittens, you find yourself fostering a whole litter of kittens without a mum, or you are looking after one or two orphaned babies. In either of these situations the steps and the basics of care of the kittens are the same.

### **Weighing**

Weigh, Weigh, Weigh! Weighing a newborn/neonatal kitten is the most important thing that we can do to monitor their health. We recommend weighing these little things once a day and recording their weight and what they are eating on an easy to follow recording sheet. You should be seeing an average weight gain of 10 grams per day, over a 24-hour period. If there is no increase in weight for more than a day or you see a drop in weight, please contact the foster team. Even a small amount of weight loss in a kitten less than one week old can be deadly, so please do not hesitate to reach out!

### **Feeding Neonates/Bottle Babies**

Everyone needs food to survive and kittens are no different. However, feeding neonatal kittens is not as easy as plopping a bowl of food down in front of this blind and deaf potato, hoping it will eat. It is a

delicate and very important process which when done properly will help the kitten survive and grow up to be a healthy teenager. A small thing to remember (and why it is so important to weigh the kittens daily) is that growing kittens that are being bottle/syringe fed should be consuming 5% of their body weight at each feeding.

**\*\*NEVER give a neonate kitten anything other than the specified formula that we at SCAR approve\*\***

### **Feeding Etiquette**

- Only use clean nipples and bottles! Make sure that everything you are using while feeding the kitten is disinfected and clean.
- Feed kittens one at a time. See the chart below for a guide on how much your kitten should be having.
- Mix the milk formula up to the recommended concentration.
- Warm the milk by placing the bottle in a hot cup of water, or place in the microwave for a few seconds. You should ALWAYS TEST the temperature of the milk. Do this by placing a drop of the milk on the inner part of your wrist. It should feel just slightly warm.
- Place the kittens on a warm hard surface wrapped in a blanket to keep them warm or on a blanket over a heating pad. We want to set them up so they are as close as they can be to how they would nurse from a mom. NEVER feed a kitten while they are on their backs, this can cause the formula to go down the wrong way and end up in their little lungs.
- Gently open the kitten's mouth with your finger and place the nipple on the tongue. They should latch onto the nipple with little effort; if they are having difficulties with bottle feeding the next step is to try syringe feeding.
- Stroking kittens can help them to eat.
- Pull lightly on the bottle. This promotes strong sucking.
- Tilt the bottle up slightly. This prevents the kitten from inhaling too much air.
- Do not squeeze the bottle to force formula into the kitten's mouth. This can cause formula to move into the lungs.
- After feeding, burp your kitten by gently massaging their back.
- After feeding stimulate the kittens to urinate and/or defecate. Stimulate them with a warm cloth if necessary
- Fill out the Daily Weight and Feeding Record.

**\*\*While feeding always be on the watch for formula coming out of kitten's nose or a rasping "wet" cough. This is called aspiration, which means the kitten has ingested formula into her lungs and is in danger of "drowning."**

For more information about syringe or bottle feeding kittens please watch these helpful videos:

<http://www.kittenlady.org/syringefeeding> and <http://www.kittenlady.org/bottlefeeding>.

### **Syringe Feeding Gruelies (weaning kittens)**

Bottle babies should be switched to syringe gruel when they reach 3.5-4 weeks old (when their canine teeth begin to grow in). Okay, great but what is Gruel!? Gruel is simply a very high quality wet kitten food mixed with water into a smooth paste -sounds delicious!

It is important to note that the syringe gruel phase is, essentially, nothing more than a layover between nursing (formula or mama's milk) and weaning (eating independently). So, at this stage, you should make sure your kittens always have access to kibble, gruel, (canned food with water), and a bowl of water, as eventually they will decide to go it on their own!

Until that magical day, though, you will need to step in! Remember that just because you see your kittens eating on their own, this does not mean that they're eating enough independently to maintain their health. Too often, fosters assume that because they've witnessed their kittens eating kibble or gruel from a bowl, those kittens do not need to be syringe fed anymore. This is not the case – and failure to follow the steps outlined above can lead to serious illness and/or death of kittens.

#### How to make syringe gruel:

You will need a blender. Blend approximately one can of food with 1/3 to 1/2 can water (double, triple, etc as needed). Your syringe gruel should be about the consistency of a milkshake, and you should be able to easily draw it up into a syringe.

Kittens should eat approximately 5% of their body weight at each feeding. Weighing the kittens before and after each feed will help determine how much gruel they will need.

#### Feeding instructions:

- Always give your kitten the opportunity to eat independently first! Offer kitten warmed up gruel and kibble in separate plates or shallow bowls. If kitten shows no interest after a while, proceed with syringe feeding.
- Draw warmed syringe gruel (microwave to a bit above lukewarm temp – no more than 5-10 seconds. Test on the inside of your wrist for the correct temperature – the gruel should feel neither cold nor hot) into 10mL syringe.
- With the syringe in your dominant hand, use your non-dominant index finger and thumb to grip the kitten's head gently at her temples. Tilt kitten's head back at about a 45-degree angle, using your palm to gently force kitten into a seated position.
- Insert syringe into side of kitten's mouth. Do not put syringe directly in front of kitten's mouth (even if she tries to position herself this way!) as kitten could very easily choke.
- Very slowly syringe gruel into kitten's mouth, removing the syringe every few seconds to allow her to swallow.
- Weigh kitten periodically throughout feeding process – the kitten is done eating when she has gained her 5%!
- Always thoroughly clean off any gruel on the kitten's fur as it can be a very messy process.
- Dry kitten off well.

#### Feeding Gruelies

This is the last stage of kitten rearing – foster parents rejoice! When your kittens begin eating enough gruel and kibble on their own to gain weight consistently every day, you are well on your way to throwing those syringes out!

Do not get too excited yet, though – your kittens will still need to be syringe fed if they're not able to eat 5% of their bodyweight on their own. The switch from syringe gruel to gruel/kibble is not a magical “aha!” moment on your kitten's part – it is a process you'll both need to work through very thoughtfully!

Once you see that your kittens are gaining around 5% of their bodyweight on a daily basis, for at least 5 days, you can begin to weigh them twice a day, instead of every time they eat. NEVER go more than 24 hours without weighing your kittens – weight loss is the number one reason kittens pass away in foster care!

For more information about weaning kittens please watch this helpful video:

<https://www.kittenlady.org/weaning>

#### Toileting and Cleaning Neonates

Up until around the age of three to four weeks old your little furry friends are not able to go to the toilet on their own or clean their faces and need a little bit of help. Like humans if the little ones do not consistently urinate or defecate it can cause serious problems, this is where you come in. To help the kittens what you need to do is gently rub a warm moist cloth or cotton pad on the anus and genital areas immediately after a feeding. This will stimulate kittens to urinate and/or defecate into the cloth or cotton pad. If a mother cat is present, she will stimulate the kittens and you do not have to do this manually. Also use a fresh moist warm cloth or cotton pad to clean around the kittens' face.

For some more information on how to stimulate a neonate kitten to urinate or defecate please watch this helpful video: <http://www.kittenlady.org/stimulating>

### **Litter Box Training**

Once kittens reach the four week mark you can begin to show them how to use the litter box, Woohooo! Kittens are very smart learn quickly. Here are a few steps that will make this transition an easy one:

- Use a low box (ex. A shallow cardboard box, or one with the sides cut down, or a cake tin)
- Only use a small amount one inch of non-clumping kitty litter or shredded newspaper. (Clumping kitty litter or crystal kitty litter can be dangerous if it is ingested.)
- After feeding, place the kitten in the litter box.
- Take her paw and gently scratch the litter.
- Give lots of praise when they are successful.
- Be patient!
- Keep the litter box clean and away from the food area.

Thank you for taking the time to read through all the basics of taking care of your neonatal fosters. Once you have read over this information you should feel quite confident that you are ready to take on your foster babies. Of course, there is much more than just the basics that can be learnt and please find attached to this document a few extra resources such as:

- Links to videos for further instruction on syringe feeding, bottle feeding and toileting
- Fading Kitten Syndrome- What is it and what to do about it?
- Kitty Expectations and Care by Age Chart
- Minimum Feeding Requirements Chart
- Record Keeping Chart

As always, our foster team and all our staff are here to support you on this fun and exciting experience. Please never hesitate to contact us with any questions or concerns; we are always here for you and your foster babies.

### **Fading Kitten Syndrome**

You are not receiving this handout because Fading Kitten Syndrome (FKS) is a common occurrence, but rather because if you ever encounter this condition, YOU will need to take action IMMEDIATELY. You must ensure first aid is given to the kitten at home. YOU are this kitten's best chance at making it.

After first aid is given, you may then be instructed to bring your kitten to us for veterinary attention (see contact details at the beginning of this document).

FKS is a life-threatening emergency in which a kitten "crashes" and begins to fade away. Kittens under 3 weeks old and/or kittens that are, or were recently sick, are most susceptible to FKS. Often times, it occurs in kittens that have been eating poorly, and losing, or, not gaining weight. This is why it is VITAL that you

weigh your kittens every time they're fed. Although it is rare, FKS can also occur in healthy kittens at any age.

#### Symptoms of FKS:

- Extreme lethargy — unable to stand or hold head up, not responding when touched
- Body feels cool to the touch (not just insides of ears — all over)
- Panting or gasping for breath
- Meowing/crying out in distress

If you see these symptoms, it is crucial that you take the following steps NOW:

#### Step 1: GET KITTEN WARM

Grab your heating pad and a towel. Place the towel over the heating pad, and place kitten on top of towel. Roll heating pad up to create a "kitten burrito" — like you are swaddling an infant. Leave the kitten's face exposed, and do not remove kitten from the burrito even if he/she struggles and cries to get out! Make sure the heating pad is still on the low setting.

\* If you do not have a spare heating pad, you can either:

- a. Keep your dryer running full of towels. Grab a new hot one every 5 minutes and wrap it around the "burrito" towel. After 5 minutes, trade that towel out for a new hot one. Do not remove the "burrito" towel.
- b. Fill 2 socks full of rice; tie the ends so it does not spill out. Throw them in the microwave for 2 minutes. Keep them next to the kitten on the outside of the burrito towel. Every 30 minutes reheat one sock and leave the other next to the kitten so she doesn't cool off. Ensure the rice-socks are not too hot as they may burn the kitten. You should be able to comfortably hold one in your hand.

#### Step 2: GET KITTEN'S BLOOD SUGAR UP

Grab a small bowl and fill it with glucose syrup or strong sugar/water solution. The more sugar content, the better. Make sure you have your syringe handy. Warm the contents up in the microwave for a few seconds until the liquid is a bit above room temperature. Test the temperature on the inside of your wrist. You will administer this sugar water (with the syringe) to the kitten while he/she is in the burrito. Give the kitten about 1 drop every 3 minutes.

#### Step 3: CALL US IMMEDIATELY

\*Successfully following these steps could be the difference between life and death for one of your little furry friends.\*

To help work out why your kitten won't eat and how to troubleshoot this problem, please have a read of this article: <https://www.maddiesfund.org/assets/documents/Institute/Orphaned%20Kittens%20Common%20Feeding%20Issues%20and%20Solutions.pdf>

## Kitty Expectations and Care by Age

Weeks	Feeding	Development
0-1	Bottle feed ½ tablespoon of formula every 2-3 hours, overnight feeding can be every 3-4 hours. If there is a mum cat, make sure that all kittens are nursing. Kittens can nurse from mum for up to 45 minutes at a time. A lot of crying or activity could indicate a problem with mum's milk supply.	Kittens will weigh about 110 grams. Kittens will sleep 90% of the time and eat the rest of the time. Handle the kittens minimally. Newborns are deaf and blind and are unable to maintain their body temperature. Keep kittens warm with provided heating source.
1-2	Bottle feed every 2-3 hours until kittens are full but not bloated. Overnight feeding can be every 3-4 hours. Generally, kittens eat ½ tablespoon per feeding	Kittens should about 190 grams. Ear canals open between 5-8 days. Eyes open between 8-14 days. Healthy kittens will be round and warm and have pink skin. Healthy kittens seldom cry. They are still unable to maintain their body temperature. Keep kittens warm with provided heating source.
2-3	Bottle feed up to 1 tablespoon (15 mL) every 3-4 hours. Overnight feeding can be every 4-5 hours.	Kittens will weigh about 280 grams and will begin to crawl and stand between 18-21 days old. They begin to play with each other. Increase handling of kittens to get them used to human contact. Ensure that all interactions are gentle and positive. They are still unable to maintain their body temperature. Keep kittens warm with provided heating source.
3-4	Bottle feed every 3-4 hours until kittens are full but not bloated. Overnight feeding can be every 4 hours. Kittens may start lapping from a bowl. Feedings during the night are not required unless kittens are not thriving.	Kittens will weigh about 360 grams. Kittens begin to see well. They may start cleaning themselves but will still need help for serious cleaning. Litter box training may begin at 4 weeks of age. They are still unable to maintain their body temperature. Keep kittens warm with provided heating source.
4-5	Feed 3 tablespoons of formula every 8 hours. Weaning of kittens may begin gradually.	Litter box training may begin at 4 weeks of age.
5-6	Feed gruel 4 times a day. Introduce dry food and water. Some kittens will be fussy on their canned food – if this is the case let our team know and we can try different brands to find one they like.	Kittens can start to wander around the room, under supervision. Play with your kittens often!
6-7	Feed canned and dry food at least 3 meals daily. If any kittens are territorial with food, provide a second bowl so that everyone gets fed.	Kittens will start to act like actual cats: playing and washing themselves. Be sure to show them the litter box after meals, play sessions and naps.
7-8+	Each kitten will be eating a little over one can of food per day. Offer wet food 3-4 times a day. Leave a bowl of dry food and water for kittens to use at will. DO NOT feed kitten table scraps.	Continue playing and socialising with the kittens. At the 7-week stage the kitten should weigh approximately 700grams and will be ready to be desexed.

Minimum Feeding Requirements for Kittens Based on Weight  
(5g food per 100g body weight/1g per 20g body weight)

Weight of kitten before feeding in grams	Weight of kitten after feeding in grams	Amount of food consumed in grams	Notes
60	63	3	- Feed bottles babies as much as they will take on their own from the bottle; syringe feed when they do not eat enough on their own.
80	84	4	
100	105	5	
120	126	6	- When bottle babies have been syringe fed previously, try to bottle feed them first, and then syringe feed if they will not eat from the bottle.
140	147	7	
160	168	8	
180	189	9	- When gruel kittens have been syringe fed previously see if they will eat on their own first. If not, then proceed to syringe feed them. Be sure to accurately chart their weight.
200	210	10	
220	231	11	
240	252	12	
260	273	13	
280	294	14	
300	315	15	- If gruel kittens lose weight from previous feedings but have been eating on their own, syringe feed the required amount. Be sure to accurately record beginning and ending weights.
320	336	16	
340	357	17	
360	378	18	
380	399	19	
400	420	20	
420	441	21	-If the kitten eats on its own, be sure to record the beginning and ending weight accurately.
440	462	22	
460	483	23	
480	504	24	
500	525	25	
520	546	26	
540	567	27	
560	588	28	
580	609	29	
600	630	30	
620	651	31	
640	672	32	
660	693	33	
680	714	34	
700	735	35	

**\*REMEMBER\***

**WEIGH – FEED – WEIGH**



**Example of Neonate Kitten Daily Weight and Feeding Record**

NAME/ID	KITTEN 1	KITTEN 2	KITTEN 3	KITTEN 4	KITTEN 5	KITTEN 6
Date						
Weight						
Attitude						
<b>FEEDING 1</b>						
Milk volume						
Stool/urine						
<b>FEEDING 2</b>						
Milk volume						
Stool/urine						
<b>FEEDING 3</b>						
Milk volume						
Stool/urine						
<b>FEEDING 4</b>						
Milk volume						
Stool/urine						
<b>FEEDING 5</b>						
Milk volume						
Stool/urine						
<b>FEEDING 6</b>						
Milk volume						
Stool/urine						

**NOTES:**

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