



FOUND KITTENS: FIRST STEPS

One of the biggest mistakes people make when finding stray kittens is taking them away from their mother. Neonatal kittens are still nursing and need to be fed frequently, so they should be kept with their mother, if possible. We must emphasize again how important it is to not to intervene with found kittens unless absolutely necessary. So, as the first step, investigate — does the stray kitten have a mother?

Here's how to assess the situation:

1. Are the kittens sleeping comfortably? The mother is probably coming back.
2. When you recheck on them, are any of them missing? The mother is moving them.
3. If they're often found sleeping, then the mother is caring for them.
4. To be absolutely sure, sprinkle some flour around where the kittens are located and look for paw prints upon your return. If the mother is in the picture, let them be. In approximately eight weeks, go back and TNR (trap/neuter/return) the whole family.
5. If the kittens look scrawny, are crying a lot, are very dirty or are covered in fleas, they have probably been abandoned.

What to do if the stray kitten does not have a mother

If you have determined the stray kitten (or kittens!) does not have a mother, his greatest chance for survival begins with you, not an animal shelter. The first thing you'll need to do is capture the stray kitten. For some kittens, this is as easy as reaching out and scooping them up. For others, you may need to contact a local animal society or shelter to obtain the humane traps often used in TNR. Simply place the trap out with some food inside, and wait nearby. The kitten should wander in and trigger the trap to close its door. Kittens do not get hurt in the process!



What is the first thing you should do once you have the kittens?

Quickly age the kittens and assess their body temperature.

Approx kitten weights:

- Newborn = 3-4 ounces
- One week = 8 ounces
- Four weeks = 1 pound

* Teeth are the most accurate indicator of age from 4 weeks to 6 months.

Prior to 2-3 weeks of age, other indicators are needed (see aging chart in the Found Kittens page):

- Umbilical cord wet: less than 12 hours old
- Umbilical cord dry: at least 1 day, less than 5 days
- Eyes open: 7-10 days
- Ears upright: about 3 weeks
- Tail up, walking: about 4 weeks

Body Temperature

Kittens less than five to six weeks of age cannot regulate their body temperature, so warmth is most important. Any kitten who is cold will need to be warmed slowly. Kittens should feel very warm to the touch as their normal body temperature is around 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Feeding kittens who are not warm and hydrated is very dangerous: never attempt to feed a cold kitten.

If you have found a kitten that seems weak, lethargic, two of the most common factors are hypothermia (being cold) and hypoglycemia (low blood sugar). Many times, there are other underlying issues, such as congenital defects, disease, etc. that may not be treatable. The following steps will give the kitten the best chance to make a recovery.

EMERGENCY PROTOCOL TO STABILIZE A KITTEN

IF THE KITTEN FEELS COLD, PROVIDE WARMTH (MOST COMMON):

Wrap the kitten in a blanket or towel, leaving only their face exposed. Use a heat source (snuggle safe, heating pad) as an extra source of heat. Your body heat is not sufficient to warm a cold kitten. A sock filled with rice and heated in the microwave for a few minutes is a good makeshift heat source. Make sure the heat source is not directly touching the kitten to prevent burns. Constantly monitor the kitten's temperature, and adjust the little one's position to warm all areas of the body.

- Never leave a debilitated kitten alone with a heat source as overheating and burns may occur.
- If at all possible, get the kitten to a veterinarian ASAP – even if the kitten seems to be responding to the warming techniques. A thorough exam will help determine if the kitten suffered any short-term or permanent injury to its organ systems and if additional treatment is needed.

INCREASE BLOOD SUGAR –While warming (or, if necessary, cooling) the kitten, apply light Karo corn syrup to the gums. If Karo is not available, use pancake syrup or mix equal parts sugar and warm water until dissolved. Use a syringe or your finger to place a few drops of the sugar source into the kitten's mouth EVERY 3 MINUTES. If swallowing, feed the kitten a small amount of the sugar source. You should see improvement in about 20 minutes if low blood sugar is the cause of the lethargy.

Healthy Kittens

If the kitten/s you found seem bright, active and alert, and not too hot or cold, you may proceed to provide basic care for them. Containing and monitoring the formerly stray kittens will be key to their health and well-being. All kittens under 6 weeks will need to be provided with a heat source, even if they are not hypothermic. We do not recommend letting kittens mingle with your resident pets (see Setting Up a Space For Foster Kittens). Kittens under 4 weeks will likely need to be bottle fed. Kittens 4 weeks and up may be able to eat canned food on their own and use a litter box.

IF THE KITTEN IS TOO HOT, COOL THEM DOWN!

If the kitten feels hot to the touch, and has other signs of hyperthermia such as panting, excessive drooling, or bright red tongue and gums, you will need to cool them down. Get them out of the sun and into a cool place. You may apply rubbing alcohol on the kittens' paw pads, and cool the body with a cool, wet washcloth—and/or use cooling fan directed toward kitten. If possible, get the kitten to the vet ASAP -even if the kitten seems to be responding to the cooling techniques. **DO NOT continually or for long periods of time, apply cold/wet water or towels to the pet because the condition can fast lead to hypothermia.** NEVER immerse the kitten in ice.

See the webinar Alley Cat Allies, Help! I Found a Kitten!, for details on immediate critical care:
www.alleycat.org/resources/kitten-care-webinars/



Thank you for helping us save lives!

For complete info on basic kitten care and additional resources visit:
www.blueridgehumane.org/resources/lost-found/kittens

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