

## How to Raise Orphaned Kittens

**Mom's gone, and you're taking care of her orphaned kittens. Here's what to do.**

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The toilet paper in your kit is for what you probably already suspect. The mother cat licks her kittens to stimulate passage of urine and stool, and as the surrogate "mom," you must take over this task. Cradling the kitten in your hand with its belly exposed, use a small wad of tissue to gently "tickle" the kittens' back ends, catching any urine or feces produced. Keep going until they're done. Kittens that are very small probably won't produce much feces until just before their eyes open. If they don't begin producing a little every three to four days, bring them to your veterinarian to make sure there's no intestinal blockage.

**What If They Won't Eat?** If your kittens continually refuse the bottle, getting them to eat may be as simple as pushing the nipple farther into their mouths. Kittens feed with the nipple deeper than you might think, so hold it in while giving the bottle a very gentle squeeze to give them a kick-start. Once they get used to the idea of the rubber nipple, they should go for it on their own, and you should only serve as a bottle holder while they nurse.

In an extreme case in which a kitten refuses to eat, consult with your veterinarian about using a stomach tube, a technical procedure that, if used improperly, can cause a kitten to die from aspiration.

Elizabeth Newell, a volunteer with the nonprofit rescue agency Town Cats in Morgan Hill, Calif., has done her share of tube feeding.

"Several years ago, a man brought me two little kittens that had been dumped in his driveway," Newell said. "They were only a few days old, and after four days one of them started to fail. That's when I learned how to tube feed. Everyone said she'd die, that there was no hope for her, but little Taun Taun made it and went to a good home. She's my favorite of all time."

When the kittens start nursing from the bottle, keep a careful eye on their weight and how much they're eating. A 3-day-old kitten should weigh about 2 ounces and eat about a tablespoon of formula at a sitting. Feed the kittens four times a day (or every two to four hours) for the first week, then three times a day for the next three weeks, then twice a day when they're weaned at four weeks.