



No More Homeless Pets Forum
July 11-15, 2005

Orphaned Infant Care in Foster Homes

Wendy Brooks, DVM, of Mar Vista Animal Medical Center answers our questions about how to keep the tiny babies in our care warm, well-fed, and well-socialized.

Introduction from Dr Wendy Brooks:

I live in a city that is sadly rife with discarded pets. Our shelter system euthanizes approximately 4,000 dogs and cats each month, despite a highly diverse and organized number of rescue groups. I have been working with rescue groups for over 10 years seeing the typical shelter illnesses, both serious and minor. Euthanasia of relinquished pets kills more animals than any disease outbreak. This is a problem for which we all must open our hearts and homes if there is to be a solution. Pet by pet, home by home, and, finally, community by community. This is about education, awareness, and dedication.

I answer pet care questions by e-mail on a daily basis and I can help answer yours in this forum. This week, we focus on orphaned infants and their care.

Dr Wendy Brooks Bio:

Wendy Brooks, DVM, is the owner of the Mar Vista Animal Medical Center in Los Angeles. Dr. Brooks is a board-certified specialist in canine and feline practice, and a member of the American Academy of Veterinary Dermatology. In addition, as AltheaVet@aol.com, she answers questions posted by the public online, and she has been a staff veterinarian and consultant to VeterinaryPartner.com since 1994.

Dr. Brooks is a native of the Los Angeles area, but attended Mount Holyoke College, graduating with high honors in 1983. She graduated from the University of California at Davis School of Veterinary Medicine in 1988.

Company for single orphans?

Question from Angie:

We've had some debate over what to do with single orphans. The choices are to partner them up with another single cat (or with a litter) or to just leave the cat by herself until she's old enough to be tested for FIV & Feline Leukemia. Is it worth the risk of spreading disease to make the kittens' lives a little happier

by giving them company? The kittens that don't get to learn from other cats tend to be obnoxious! It's a matter of risk/benefit analysis and I'd love your take on it!

Response from Dr Wendy Brooks:

I believe it is infinitely better to put a single orphan with another kitten or litter (if possible). The more natural their up-bringing can be the better they will socialize in the future.

Ideally, a wet nurse cat (a lactating queen) would be available, but having other kittens around is the next best thing.

A mother cat teaches her kittens the subtle art of when play is too rough and when to be nice with one's siblings. When orphans are hand raised, there is simply no way to teach them this, which is why so many bottle babies become behaviorally 'off' when they grow up. Many are aggressive, or overly bonded to one caretaker.

Having other kittens (but no adults) still doesn't make up for it, but it helps.

Queens also provide some important immune support in their milk.

Support for kittens who are too skinny

Question from Anita:

I rescue cats/kittens in my area. We get a lot of babies who are so very emaciated because their systems are severely depleted by coccidia. They're like little skeletons, who have severe diarrhea. I also belong to an online cat lovers' group and we would LOVE to know: What is the BEST kitten food to feed these babies? Thanks so much and keep up the GREAT work!

Response from Dr Wendy Brooks:

It all depends on how sick they are. Let's assume they still have an appetite. You will want something that is low residue/highly digestible. In our hospital we like Hills A/D for this. It has calories for growth, it is low residue, and made to be easy to eat and highly palatable.

Many laypeople swear by Nutrical, which is basically a sugar supplement with vitamins added. It can have a laxative effect if one gives too much. It does not replace actual food and should only be used as a sugar supplement if hypoglycemia is a concern (probably best to let the veterinarian decide). A little dab isn't going to be harmful and might be helpful but it would be a mistake to think this is more than a quick "candy bar" nutritionally speaking.

When diarrhea is severe, maintaining hydration is paramount so don't forget the subcutaneous (SQ) fluids.

The decision on the amount of SQ fluids and how often is very individual and must be determined by the veterinarian involved. Personally, I do not like to warm fluids as it is very easy to make them too warm and cause a burn. But, if the patient is very small and having trouble keeping body temperature up, you can warm fluids to 100 degrees F. Use a thermometer in a water bath to do this.

A sickly kitten that does not have an appetite should be hospitalized. The vet's office has all sorts of feeding techniques and food options.

Hope this helps!

When is it time to call in the professionals?

Question from Christine:

I foster for a large, open admissions organization and occasionally help out around the shelter with young kittens. Recently they had a feral stray Mom, which they held for five days, that they were going to put down. She had five kittens approximately 3.5 weeks old. I immediately got them to put the kittens aside for me to foster, realizing I couldn't talk them into giving me the Mom too, after presenting them with some canned food and ascertaining they could eat on their own, as I have a full time job and can't do bottle babies.

I'm not a bottle feeder, but I tried warm goats milk to at least supplement them, but they were uninterested. They would eat baby food warmed, so that's what I've been feeding, mixed in with a little Science Diet formula for hard to interest kitties. Yesterday the first kitten died. I came home and administered sub-Q fluids and everyone perked up and ate. This morning the second kitten died. When I left for work one kitten would eat, the other two would not, even forcing their little jaws open and syringing them with food. I gave sub-Q fluids again this morning. Maybe I did them a disservice by trying to save them. I can't imagine I did a good thing. They have teeth and I've done this age before, they just don't want to eat. Any ideas?

Response from Dr Wendy Brooks:

When baby kittens do not eat, it is time to consider having the professionals take over (i.e. get the kittens hospitalized). A healthy kitten gains 10-15 grams per day (be sure to have a good gram scale to weigh them). If the kittens are not gaining at the appropriate rate, something is wrong.

If they are sick, the problem should be identified and treated directly. Until that happens, they still need their calories and that could mean tube feeding (not something that an inexperienced fosterer can safely do).

In this case we have kittens who should be old enough to eat, but they are dying. We know their mother was feral and do not know the extent of her issues (feline leukemia status etc.).

I assume the kittens don't have flea issues anymore, but they may still be contending with flea anemia in which case they need blood transfusions. I know all of this adds up to substantial expense, but young lives are fragile and it takes extra effort--and sometimes money and professional care--to sustain them. And even then, sometimes our efforts are futile. At least we can then know that we tried our very best and did everything we could.

I suppose if we were going to do this over again, it might have been better to leave them with their mother for longer (assuming the shelter would keep her around a few more weeks), but since they are fading fast, I'd say it's time to see the vet for more specific recommendations. If possible, bring the body of a kitten who didn't make it, for necropsy. This will help you diagnose

An, um, embarrassing and serious problem

Question from Carla:

On June 24th around 10 in the morning, my neighbor Ava knocked on my door; she had 2 newborn kittens (4-7 days old) that she had found at her job on the asphalt parking lot by the trash dumpsters. Would I be able to help them? Another neighbor Lena, went to Petco to purchase bottles & a canister of Kitten Meal Replacement (KMR) for formula.

Here in Houston it's been unusually hot & dry beginning in May. These 2 kittens were very dehydrated and it was 2 days before they urinated. We still have problems with their bowel movements. AND the problem is that these 2 kittens have suckled each others privates ever since I got them. I can't seem to break them (zinc oxide to deter hasn't worked either). I am concerned that this will hurt them, especially since their teeth are in. I have not run across this before; have you? I am now trying to wean them to canned kitten food (mixed with formula); they are also doing well on their litter (pine pellets). AND I already have their new homes lined up (which they should be able to go to in about 2 weeks).

Response from Dr Wendy Brooks:

Zinc oxide is quite toxic so I really hope we do not have zinc toxicity issues here. Never use zinc oxide topicals on animals. They readily lick the zinc which causes red blood cell destruction. There are some veterinary websites that discuss this further, which you may find helpful. Here are a couple:

http://www.marvistavet.com/html/body_zinc_poisoning.html

http://chitchatcats.com/health_info.html

As for the sucking thing, this is actually pretty common and some very significant tissue damage can result. You may have to separate them if they continue to do it. Be very watchful for redness or bruising. I have seen some spectacular tissue sloughs. After you are sure you can supervise them or the sucking thing is over, then they can spend time together.

Also, it sounds like they are only about 3 weeks old. This is too young for canned food; maybe in another week.

Be figuring they will be able to go in more like another 4-5 weeks; I wouldn't adopt them before they are 8 weeks old at the earliest. As I mentioned in an earlier posting, this will give them time to learn from another during an important stage of growth; when they are learning bite inhibiting behaviors.

By 8 weeks they should be old enough for vaccines, first check-up and even neutering at that age. After that, they can go to their new homes. If cost is a concern, the adopters can cover the costs up front, in lieu of an adoption fee. For more info on the benefits of what's termed early age spay/neuter (performed when the patient weighs 2 pounds, which generally occurs at 8 weeks), please visit

<http://www.bestfriends.org/nomorehomelesspets/pdf/juvenilepayneuter.pdf> and

<http://www.bestfriends.com/archives/forums/pediatric.html>.

What about flea control?

Question from Carole:

Kittens may come in flea infested. What is the best way to deal with this problem for kittens that may be weak and are too young for topical applications such as Advantage and Frontline? Do you risk killing the kitten by bathing him/her even if you warm the kitten quickly after the bath?

Can you also tell us how to check for flea-induced anemia?

Response from Dr Wendy Brooks:

There is no product that is labeled for use in kittens under 8 weeks that I know of. Unfortunately, as a condition of keeping my veterinary license current, it is also not legal for me to tell you to do something that is off-label with regards to an insecticide.

I can tell you what we often do when a kitten is very small and loaded with fleas: we use half a Capstar tablet. If you see a lot of flea infested kittens, I recommend that you lay in a supply of small sized Capstar for this use. A full tablet is labeled for use in kittens 2 lbs and over. I see no reason to deal with the stress of a bath. If you are not familiar with Capstar see:

<http://www.ah.novartis.com/products/en/cab/capstar.shtml>

As for checking for anemia, it is tricky when you don't have actual ability to run a blood test (which tells you for sure if a transfusion is on the table). Check the kitten's gum color. If it is white or pale then you probably have flea anemia. If the kitten is also weak and cold, it probably needs a blood transfusion. If the kitten is pretty strong, you can try the Capstar and an iron supplement if you really feel like taking some risks due to lack of money. If you don't want to take any risks and the kitten is pale, see the vet for a quick hematocrit test to see if he is anemic and if so, how badly.

Most vitamin supplements do not contain iron so if fleas are a problem in your area, get some kind of vitamins that do have iron. Pet Tinnic is a good brand (your vet probably has something).

Hope this helps!

All about diets and diarrhea!

Questions from Anne, Carole, Joan, and Jann:

Dr. Brooks, we are so happy to have a chance to ask questions! We have had many, many sets of bottle babies, and have almost always run into issues with diarrhea, sometimes really horrible and hard to reverse.

Diet questions:

What formula do you recommend? We've used Just Born, and KMR. We are extremely careful with sterilization and safe water and proper proportions, and still have run into problems with both. We also give Benebac routinely now. Is it safe for kittens to take Culturelle capsules and add the powder to the formula? Do you recommend another available formula or a hand made one? If a motherless declining kitten is younger than 3-4 weeks should milk replacement be supplemented with anything? Do you recommend lactose-free milk for cats & kittens? Is this kind of milk an acceptable substitute for kitten milk replacement formula? Many times they get to 3-4 weeks of age without any gastrointestinal problems,

then loose to liquid stools start; it usually coincides with the gradual change from formula (or goat's milk- we have tried both ways) to kitten food. We use Science Diet, or Baby Lamb mixed with lactose free milk replacer and Gerber's rice cereal. At what age do you suggest food be introduced? What are the best foods to give to a motherless kitten that is between 4-8 weeks of age and is failing? We're ready to try anything, there must be something gentler on their systems.

Diarrhea questions:

How do you treat the diarrhea? We've been through rounds of Panacur, Albon, Sucralfate, and occasionally antibiotics (including Keflex-like antibiotic) have been used depending on the case. We use a combination of Preparation H for the rectal swelling and Vaseline or Bag Balm for the scald. Since diarrhea is so common, most caretakers use Albon immediately, assuming it is coccidia without confirming it diagnostically. Isn't corona virus a major cause as well? Considering the limited resources of shelters and rescuers, not every kitten can be brought to a vet. What would be your recommendations aside from de-worming at two week intervals?

Response from Dr Wendy Brooks:

Diet answers:

Personally I use KMR and always have but I am not convinced that it matters that much. I do find the commercially prepared formulas to be easiest to work with.

Milk replacement doesn't need to be supplemented with anything, just make sure the proper amount of calories are getting in and that infectious disease is ruled out or being treated.

For kittens, lactose is not a problem. They keep their ability to digest lactose readily until they get older and approach adolescence. At this point you have to see how much lactose is a problem if you use milk (i.e. how much they can drink without getting diarrhea), or just use lactose free. However, this kind of milk is not an acceptable substitute for kitten milk replacement formula.

I suggest food be introduced when the kittens are 4 weeks of age.

Baby Lamb is pretty deficient and not very calorie-rich. How about using Hill's Prescription Diet a/d? I like it as it is syringeable if necessary and has enough calories for growth.

Diarrhea answers:

Adult cats take a half capsule of Culturelle twice a day. I don't know of a kitten dose and I'm not sure anyone knows if either Benebac or Culturelle works.

You said you are very careful with sterilization. Are the kitten areas re-used on new kittens, and do you use a new cardboard carrier each time? If you use plastic carriers how are they cleaned between litters? Do you use paper towels or cloth rags? If you use cloth rags do you use a fresh one on each carrier? Bacterial diarrhea is so common in kittens and very readily transmissible.

As they age beyond 3 weeks, their behavior corresponds with more oral contact and exploration in the enclosure, including greater fecal exposure to siblings. The usual culprits at this age are Salmonella and Campylobacter. It might be worth getting an affected kitten cultured. I doubt if this is about diet.

How to treat the diarrhea depends on what is causing it. I don't see compounded Flagyl on your list and that is my personal favorite. This antibiotic also has anti-inflammatory properties that make it excellent for diarrhea control. Coccidia bacteria do have the ability to hide from the microscope, so the use of Albon is hard to argue against.

Since this is a recurring problem for you, I'd strongly recommend getting at least a couple of kittens cultured for Salmonella and Campylobacter. Get fecal samples checked when there is diarrhea, to rule out parasites. If you have a veterinarian who is supervising your work and nothing seems to work, there may be a local Shelter Medicine program at the closest veterinary school where more ideas might be obtained. Your veterinarian can consult with them and keep you in the loop.

When should we let nature take its course?

Question from Kerry:

I volunteer for a no-kill rescue group and focus on cats and kittens. Last kitten season I lost 3, 4-week old kittens between the hours of midnight and 3am. They did this horrible gasping for air and it got to be longer and longer between breaths. It being the middle of the night, there were no vets open except for the emergency clinic. Since the shelter didn't authorize paying for the emergency vet visit (it was their opinion that there was nothing that could be done) I simply stayed with them as they died. I felt distraught about not spending my own money at the emergency clinic, unsure of whether anything could be done. A week later I had the 4th one starting to breath like the first 3 and brought him to another more experienced foster mom and she told me to go straight to the vet. I paid my own money for the emergency visit only to be told, "Pray for the little one" and the vet gave sub-q fluids. He died an hour later.

For those animal that we know won't make it (FIP cats, for example) we do spend the money to ensure them a good quality of life for as long as possible until the time comes when we do have to euthanize.

The vets are wonderful about being honest: there have been times when we think it's the end but the vet says we have more time.

How do we as fosters recognize when it's reasonable to go to the emergency room with our neonate kittens and when it's futile? Should we have euthanized the 4th one at the vet? Personally, I would feel best euthanizing before they die on their own, so they don't suffer. Please advise.

Response from Dr Wendy Brooks:

Unfortunately, the decision regarding when there is no hope is not straight-forward. One could argue that there is no situation for which there is no hope. Even after board certification as a specialist and 16 years in practice, I can't always tell when it is worth it to try and when it is hopeless.

Admittedly, the chances of a rebound become more and more remote once a patient has advanced to certain stages of the declining process.

To use the example you gave, dyspnea (difficulty breathing) is usually associated with the seldom reversible, end stages of the dying process. However, it has happened for a patient to experience dyspnea, even what is commonly referred to as a 'death rattle,' and come back from the brink.

My point is that if I can't tell if it is hopeless, a foster can't be expected to tell. Your job is to determine when the kitten should see the vet and let the vet evaluate the kitten as an individual and decide what makes sense. Because of their small size and immunological fragility, kittens can sometimes go downhill so fast that catching the problem in its early stages can be a challenge. To help, common signs that it's time to seek professional help include those listed at <http://www.bestfriends.com/theanimals/pdfs/cats/catsignsofhealth.pdf>.

This discussion may sound morbid, but perhaps it will be comforting to the many bottle-feeders who have felt helpless to prevent the sometimes inevitable progression of decline. You are not alone, and sometimes we need to hear that we're doing the right thing by taking these littlest ones on, even if their hold on life is sometimes tenuous.

Exposing resident pets to contagious fosters

Question from Sami:

I've been fostering a litter of kittens (6-8 weeks old when I got them) for the past week and a half. They all developed classic panleukopenia symptoms, including diarrhea, vomiting, dehydration, fever, loss of appetite and lethargy. One was given every possible treatment, including IV fluid therapy, around-the-

clock hospitalization, etc. He was 'definitively diagnosed' via blood work...the only possible loophole is that he was tested shortly AFTER vaccination, which may have induced a false positive? He passed away 4 days after becoming symptomatic.

Another kitten was euthanized after 36 hours of severe symptoms. His treatment included at-home basics such as Albon, subcutaneous fluids and Kaopectate--and the homeopathic Arsenicum at the end to ease his passing.

The third kitten recovered rapidly and fully, after 72 hours of moderate symptoms and at-home care. He has tested negative for FIV and FeLV (feline leukemia). I'm wondering how useful it is to continue the charade of keeping him separated from my resident (unvaccinated due to vaccine sensitivity), indoor-only, 5-7 year old cat, who has likely been exposed to the virus in her 'former life' as a stray. I say 'charade' because the virus is so long-lived and easily spread. And really as hard as I try to keep things clean, it's likely that the virus is in her environment now. I would just test her for past exposure, except she's exceedingly difficult to obtain a blood sample from--she fights violently, plus her veins 'shut down' and also her blood clots immediately upon entering the syringe, so only 1 drop at a time can be obtained from each vein. I've tried looking online, some sites say he needs to be quarantined for 3 months, some say he'll continue to shed the virus in his feces for 6 weeks. I hate to have him growing up alone in my bathroom, especially when it's unlikely they'll have direct physical contact (she has no interest in other cats).

Response from Dr Wendy Brooks:

How much risk you want to take is up to you, of course, but we can examine some of the risk factors.

When you say your cat is unvaccinated due to vaccine sensitivity, it sounds like she had to have had a vaccine in their somewhere to discover the sensitivity, right? What vaccine did she have, how long ago, and at what age? The answer to whether or not she can be considered protected could be in that information (your other choice is running a titer to check for antibodies indicative of immunity, as you suspected).

If this cat's last FVRCP vaccine was less than 3 years ago and we can be fairly sure that then was not her first FVRCP vaccination, then she should be protected. By the way, the 'P' in 'FVRCP stands for Panleukopenia, also known as feline distemper or feline infectious enteritis.

If she doesn't meet these criteria, then perhaps bringing her to the vet's office will help. They can give her gas anesthesia, draw the sample, and have her awake, all in about a 15 minute period (while you wait).

What was her vaccine reaction like? If there are going to be fostered kittens in the house coming and going, then it may be worth using pre-medications to minimize vaccine reactions and/or using recombinant or nasal vaccines for which reactions are unlikely.

There is also something to be said for supporting both of their immune systems with premium food, and by enriching their environment, including daily, moderate exercise, fresh air, etc.

Hope this helps!

Grab bag of kitten queries

Note from moderator:

Dr Wendy Brook's responses appear in bold and are interspersed with the questions.

Questions from Carol, Ingrid, Jesyka, Joan and Anne:

Great topic this week! Very, very helpful answers to the questions we all have. My husband and I have been fostering kittens 0-12 weeks old for several years. We have a good success rate. However, with the very little ones that we get newborn or a few days old, we've noticed that the kittens seem to reach a kind of developmental plateau around 1-2 weeks. Even if they've been eating well and eliminating as expected, around one week or so they may start having diarrhea or simply do not respond well to feeding (we use KMR). They sometimes lose interest in eating and we have to work to keep them hydrated. Some kittens sicken and die no matter what we do (including vet visits, IVs, and medicine) while others get over it, but for several days are very vulnerable. Is there some kind of developmental milestone that occurs around this time?

I can't think of anything that would specifically be involved but at this age it seems like every week there is some kind of milestone. This is within the classical 3 week period for Herpes to manifest after exposure in pregnancy. Also Sepsis (infection) from the umbilical cord could be coming to a head at about this time.

Are we seeing some kind of possible birth defect that doesn't manifest until after a week? We've dealt with cleft palate and pneumonia from exposure, but this is something different.

That could also be. Or that any traces of immune support they received from their mother has now faded.

How often do you see kittens that don't like KMR?

I've only seen kittens refuse it when they get sick.

Vets can be expensive, and we foster a lot of kittens. There are lots of reasons a kitten may not be eating as well at one feeding as before and different reasons for diarrhea. We don't like to take chances, but we can't take every kitten to the vet whenever it seems a little off. What signs are there that a kitten is in serious trouble?

Poor appetite is the main one.

Are there simple, safe remedies we can try at home before scheduling a vet visit?

Learning how to tube feed is probably the most significant thing you can learn how to do. Keep Karo syrup and syringes around and be familiar with heat support (heating pads, microwaving fluid bottles or bags etc.) Your vet should be able to set you up with some basics, such never allowing the heat source to touch the patient directly, never allowing a fluid container to cool and draw heat from the patient, etc.

In Sami's question about panleukopenia kittens, she mentioned using Kaopectate. Hasn't the formulation of Kaopectate been changed so that it now contains salicylates which can be toxic to felines?

I believe that is correct.

We had stopped using it for that reason. Are there safe substitutes we can use?

Kaopectate is generally not viewed as very effective for diarrhea in kittens as it would have to be given before the diarrhea starts to properly bind the toxins. Diarrhea is better addressed with something like compounded liquid flagyl, subcutaneous fluids, or maybe albon. Imodium can be used (get the guidelines from your vet) but you will need the liquid to be able to dose it small enough.

Do you have any opinion on using diatomaceous earth to rid animals of fleas when insecticide is too harsh for the little ones? We have not tried it yet but are considering it at an animal shelter where we have a chigger problem.

Diatomaceous earth is carcinogenic and you should not use it in any way, shape or form. It is similar to asbestos in its inability to be removed from the body. I like Capstar for kittens too small for bathing.

We use polyester fleece cut into pieces, washed daily in hot water with good detergent and OxiClean, and then through the dryer. Is this sufficient? Our other kittens and adult fosterlings have used the fleece and the only ones who have the diarrhea are my little orphans.

That should be sufficient. Can you bleach them as well? That would be even better.

We have just adopted a single, orphaned, 4 week old kitten from the humane society, and took him straight to the vet. He has upper respiratory infection (URI), as pretty much ALL the kittens do at the shelter, along with slight anemia and he was dehydrated. Now, he has a great appetite, (feeding him Hill's Prescription Diet a/d) and solid bowel movements. He weighs 9 oz. He is on Clavamox twice a day, and has been for 5 days. He still seems lethargic, however. Are we doing something wrong? What should we look for in his recovery? Thanks for your help.

Sometimes it is hard to judge lethargy as kittens like to sleep. I'd hate to mess with things if he is really OK. I would recommend notifying the vet to go through the details of what you are seeing. It might just be normal for his age.

Basic guides for neonate care

Note from moderator:

Dr Wendy Brook's responses appear in bold font, and are interspersed throughout the question.

Question from Rhonda:

Thank Heavens I found someone to answer my questions. We are also feeding a cat outside that is just a kitten herself and just gave birth to a litter 5 days ago. Unfortunately my worst fears were confirmed that she had given birth to them in the construction site dump pile across the street. I didn't get a chance to get over there and tear the dump apart to look for them and the trucks came and removed the pile. They killed most of the litter, but two were spared. I have them now. I got them two days ago and have been taking care of them like mom would. I have tried to give them back to mom but she wants to kill them. They have been handled too much and one is injured in the foot and we are hoping for the best for that one. The other one is the runt and that is the one we were trying to give back to her but no go. Mom sits outside all day and night meowing very loudly as if she wants the babies back but she won't take them. She wants to come in but I think she has feline leukemia. The babies will be tested if they survive.

I am keeping the babies away from all the other cats. They survived the first 48 hours with us and to me that is a good sign. I have called the humane society to see if we could get some financial help with the wounded one and they said no and that the kittens would be put to sleep which broke my heart. I can't let that happen.

My questions are:

1. My two new babies are stimulated to go 'potty' every 3-4 hours or whenever they eat. One of them is really bulging and has what I would call hemorrhoids. Instead of using the washcloth and warm water, I found that rinsed out tucks pads in warm water are softer on his/her little area and I have also started putting preparation H on his/her little area. It has helped the opened sores to heal but the bulge is still there with what look like white heads on it. What is this?

If this is a rectal prolapse, the kitten needs to see the vet. Kittens do not get hemorrhoids.

He/she is urinating but because I am feeding them formula for kitties they are having solid fecal and I can't tell which one is doing it in the kitty cage. I am wondering if the one with the bulge is constipated and maybe that is the bulge. Is there any way to find out?

You can actually try dripping some Karo syrup on the bulge. If it is a rectal prolapse this might decrease the swelling enough to make it dip back inside where it is supposed to be. Otherwise the vet may have to fix it.

2. The one with the cut foot is starting to do better. I couldn't afford to have the vet take care of him so we opted for Neosporin and human antibiotics. I know this isn't good but I would rather try that then to take him/her to the humane society were they would surely kill him. I am giving him 800 mg sulfamethoxazole and trimethoprim but not at that dosage. The foot is almost severed but not through the bone as I can tell. No dangling but lots of swelling. What I have done is crushed one pill and blended with 3 ounces of water. I give him one dose at .25 of an eye dropper once a day. I don't know if this will work but I just don't know what more to do. No organization here will help. My hands are tied. That is the only antibiotic I have in the house. They are fresh. Please help me with this. At least maybe you can help with a dosage amount that would be more accurate for him.

It is not legal for me to do that. It sounds like this foot may have to go. You really need to see the vet with this.

We are keeping Neosporin on the foot but no bandage as we have found that it hurts him more with the bandage. It has been two days and the foot is dry now. It's still swollen but it looks a little better than the first day. The construction guys got it with a shovel. Poor thing. Anyways any advice would be appreciated.

When you have an office call at a vet's office you establish a relationship that allows not only informed advice but on-going advice. An office call is simply not that expensive. I recommend calling around and finding out what hospital does rescue work or is inclined to be more helpful. After you have an estimate for a plan you can always 1) apply for credit at www.carecredit.com or 2) apply for financial aid through www.imom.org (but they will only help you if your carecredit application has been rejected and you have an estimate in your hand).

3. How do I know when I don't have to stimulate them any longer?

After they "go" you are done for that time. After they're habitually using the box on their own, stimulation is no longer needed in general.

4. They are 5 days old and one has lost its umbilical cord but the other has not. Is this okay?

Yes but the cord is probably dried up enough that it should pretty much fall off.

They are both eating good about every 3 hours or so about 1/4 to a 1/2 tsp of formula each. They don't seem to want any more than that. When should I get concerned about them not getting enough food? I am doing everything I can think of to keep them alive the next few days. Eating is the big concern. I need to know if they are getting enough. Thank you so much.

If you are a beginner at the Orphan Kitten thing, there are many areas that can give you more specific instructions.

http://www.marvistavet.com/html/orphan_kittens.html

<http://www.alleycat.org/pdf/basickittencare.pdf>

<http://www.alleycat.org/books.html>

http://www.carepets.org/catsub/cat_pdf/newbornhandbook.pdf

http://www.sfspca.org/gifs/pdf_factsheets/Basics.pdf

Member Comments

Comments about diet and diarrhea:

Comment from a member:

I too rescue cats/kittens. My daughter and I are known for bottle feeding as young as 2 days. We have used the Hill's Prescription Diet a/d from our vet and the kittens thrive on it (once they're ready for solids, that is). They also enjoy the taste which is very important. We have one now that at 5 weeks weighed 1/2 pound and she has been on it for less than a week and she has gained and looks great. It's not expensive either which helps when you foster over 50 kittens each summer.

Comment from Patsy:

Here are my secrets for raising healthy babies. I've raised upwards of 60 on the following formula that I received from a vet:

3 oz. sweetened condensed milk

3 oz. water

4 oz. plain yogurt w/fat (no non-fat yogurt). If you can't find plain, than use the vanilla that contains sugar and fat.

4 large egg yolks, no whites ever!

I find mixing this in a large mouth Mason Jar is best as it allows me to either shake it or mix it before each use.

The yogurt and egg yolks are great for the digestive tract.

I was told if you see stool grey or almost white in color that is an indication that you are overfeeding.

Also, don't be in too much of a hurry to transition them from formula to real food (either dry or canned). I did this a couple of times and learned too early can mean serious stomach problems. With my most recent baby, I let her tell me when she was ready for solid food. My vet kept telling me she needed to start eating solid food, but I didn't rush her (she was 8 weeks old). One day when I was feeding my dogs some of their raw meat diet as a snack, the kitten was sitting beside them (she thinks she's a 65lb. dog), so I put some of the meat in front of her and she loved it. Now of course I can't get her to eat anything else. HA! However, her stomach is not upset and she has firm stool. So take your time with the transition. If I can be of further help, please e-mail me at 2many@cox.net.

Comment from Anne:

I thought I remembered a problem with Flagyl, and confirmed with my shelter director that I was remembering the correct medication. A few years ago one of our kittens, who had just been adopted, died from horrible, irreversible neurological complications from Flagyl (balance and gait problems that rapidly progressed to paralysis and death. I am told it can be quite dangerous in small kittens. It was prescribed at a very reputable large animal hospital in Boston. I just wanted to alert you to the issue.

Response from Dr Wendy Brooks about Flagyl:

The problem with Flagyl is easily correctable. The problem is that the smallest Flagyl tablet is 250mg and it is hard to cut in pieces smaller than 1/4, still way too big for a small kitten. Having it compounded into a liquid enables one to give tiny, kitten-sized doses easily.

Comments about an embarrassing problem (suckling one another's genitals):

Comment from Anne:

I have run into this issue twice. In one case bitter apple (the spray you can buy to discourage chewing) worked, in the other it did not and I had to separate them for a few days because the poor little guy was a mess....both times it was bottle babies who lost the mom very young.

Comment from Neva:

I wanted to mention that the group I volunteer with has had a couple recent episodes with this and that the most recent resulted in the kitten who was suckled having not just tissue damage, but having to have his entire penis removed, and the urethra rerouted. I think bluntness is necessary here, given how very serious the results can be. We had not previously heard of this level of problem.

Another litter of three stopped suckling and appeared to suffer no harm when their little peters got a dab of Vaseline. It was really suggested by a vet to alleviate the inflammation but had the happy side effect of stopping this habit.

I know that some pet supply catalogs sell something called a "Snuggle Kitty" that has a heartbeat and low level of heat. It's covered in faux sheepskin, so even without nipples, it might make a tolerable pacifier.

Comments about flea control:**Comment from Beth:**

We started using Capstar for at our cat shelter for young kittens infested with fleas and it has been a Godsend; give it a try!

Comment from Jean:

If the kittens are not old enough for flea products, try picking every flea you can off the kitten. I do bathe if the kittens are strong enough for a bath and can be kept warm. I also use a blow dryer on low heat (following manufacturer directions so as to not get too close to the skin and/or dehydrate them) to dry them. My favorite thing to use to wash them is dish detergent as it kills fleas well; just be sure to rinse well. I bathe one kitten at a time and am sure to dry that kitten before doing the next one, and keep the washed separate from the unwashed. If you have help, have someone wash, another dry. Worms will also cause kittens to die. They take away any food they eat and also cause low blood values. I hope this helps. Also, it seems a good food for anemia is cooked beef liver.

Comment from Sonja:

I used De Flea Pet and Area Spray on 3-week-old puppies I fostered who were covered in fleas. The label says, "Can be used on all dogs, cats, puppies, kittens, and even nursing mothers." The active ingredients are docusate sodium and undecylenic acid. It worked very well, and didn't seem to cause any harm to the puppies. I wrapped the puppies in a towel, put them on a heating pad, and monitored them until they were dry. However, the label says, "cats and kittens should be rinsed and towel dried off after applying, due to their grooming behavior the product may cause mouth irritations."

Comment from Seda about letting nature take its course:

A couple of months ago, I found 4, newborn kittens in my backyard around 1 am. One of them, crying nonstop, died in about half an hour due to hypothermia (although I was trying to warm him up). So, I immediately bought a heating pad for the rest. Next day, I looked for the mother asking a lot of the neighbors if their cat could be the mother, with no result.

They all had appetites at first, but then they started losing their appetites one by one, and went into hypoglycemic shock. One died the next night.

Third night, I took the third one to the emergency clinic. They warmed him and gave him subcutaneous fluids. The next day I took him to our regular vet. I learned how to give subcutaneous fluids and tube feed. I started the kittens on amoxicillin in case they had something bacterial. Still, the third one died that day. The same night, the last one started showing the same symptoms, and finally went limp all over.

In denial, I was looking for a little bit of sign that maybe he wasn't dead. With my stethoscope I felt tiny heart beats. So, I started rubbing him fast with a piece of rag and giving him tiny bits of air mouth to mouth. About 15 minutes later, he started crying, and moving. I thought I saved him, so I was ecstatic. He cried about 2 hours, and later died. I tried to do the same things, but it didn't work this time.

I was very sad that I lost all 4 kittens. I thought maybe I did something wrong and that's why they all died. I also felt guilty that I revived the last kitten; he was probably in pain after he started breathing again, and I made him suffer during his last hours! Later, I told myself that there was also a chance that the newborns had some kind of a disease and that's why the mama cat abandoned them. I have raised hundreds of kittens successfully, which makes me proud. Still, not being able to help helpless creatures is always an emotionally disturbing experience.

Comment from Bonney:

Suggestion for Christine who was fostering neonatal feral kittens for a shelter where they kill feral cats:

That was so very kind of you to intervene on behalf of the kittens. It's certainly a difficulty situation to be in. If you have not already broached the subject, I'd like to suggest that you consider talking with the shelter manager/director/board about embracing Trap/Neuter/Return (T/N/R) for feral cats. It is more effective, cost-efficient and far kinder than killing.

You'll find lots of practical information about why T/N/R works better than removal plans--easy-to-read fact sheets you can share with others—on the Alley Cat Allies website in the Resource section:

www.alleycat.org.

As Dr. Brooks points out, there could be some other underlying issue with the kittens, but should this situation come up again, you might want to offer to foster the mom, too. It's better for the kittens and a lot easier than bottle feeding to have the mom cat care for them. Of course, if she has not tamed down by the time the kittens are weaned, then you would need to find a suitable relocation site for her.

I'd not rule out the possibility that she could be returned to the area she came from, but you would need to be able to find out where that was and talk to whoever brought her in. We have found that a surprising number of people can be convinced to use T/N/R as an alternative to killing once they have all the information. Often people just do not know about feral cats and T/N/R and assume that taking cats to the shelter is the best thing to do.

But worst case, is the mom cat could not be returned (after she was spayed, of course), many advocates have had success placing feral cats in barn homes. The Best Friends Network (bfnetwork@bestfriends.org) has advice available on how to find barn homes for cats that must be relocated (always best to keep cats on their home turf if possible).

Best wishes for success with these kittens and in your future work.

Closing comments from forum moderator:

Thank you to the many members who sent in questions and comments for this week's forum! Please stay posted for a future week on Animal Introductions in the coming months!

Transcripts from this and all other forum weeks are archived for easy reference, and are made available to all at <http://www.bestfriends.com/nomorehomelesspets/weeklyforum/forumarchives.cfm>. Meanwhile, those of you who joined the forum midweek can view the complete transcripts right away at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NMHP/>.

Frequently, members contact us asking for permission to share the information posted through this forum. **The answer is always yes.** We just ask that the source is acknowledged (No More Homeless Pets online forum, hosted by Best Friends Animal Society) and that the web page for the forum is provided (<http://www.bestfriends.com/nomorehomelesspets/weeklyforum/>). That way they know where to go to find out more!

As always, thank you for being part of the forum, and for everything you do for the animals!

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Kindness to animals builds a better world for all of us.