



# Maidstone Veterinary Clinic

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## HAND RAISING PUPPIES/KITTENS

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### WHY?

There are several possible reasons for the necessity of hand-raising puppies and kittens. The mother's death or illness, inadequate milk supply for the number of offspring or rejection of them are the most commonly seen reasons. The task of hand rearing puppies and kittens is not overly difficult and is very rewarding.

### HOUSING

As young puppies and kittens are not good at maintaining a constant body temperature they very quickly lose body heat if chilled. For this reason they need warm, clean and draft free surroundings, particularly if the litter is small. Supplemental heating in the form of heat pads and lights may be used if necessary. The environmental temperature in the first week of life should be 25 to 30 C and gradually reduced to 20 C at 3 - 4 weeks of age. It is important to maintain an even temperature and not to overheat them causing excessive dehydration.

Bedding can consist of old towels, clothes or clean paper material. This should be changed at least daily and more frequently as the orphans get older.

### FEEDING

#### WHAT TO FEED

Puppies and Kittens need to be fed a milk replacer solution for the first 4-5 weeks of their lives. These are available at vet clinics and pet shops. Preparation instructions should be on the label. A 1 to 5 dilution of evaporated milk to water can be used as a temporary measure.

#### HOW MUCH AND HOW OFTEN TO FEED

There are no set rules for the best feeding frequency and quantities, and must be tailored to the individual.

Milk powders give a rough guide but in general:

- \*0-2 weeks of age feed every 2-3 hours.

- \*2-4 weeks of age feed every 4-6 hours.

It is not necessary to feed throughout the night but make the last feed as late, and the first feed as early as possible.

Use a bottle and teat (available from vet clinics and pet shops). Warm the milk solution to body temperature and feed the puppy/kitten to appetite as they will naturally stop eating when satisfied. They may initially consume as little as half a teaspoon at each sitting building up to a dessertspoon full at weaning time. It is important, however, not to force feed.

A hungry pup/kit will not settle and cry continually after feeding and weight gain will be limited. If you are unsure as to how much the orphan has taken in you can use a set of kitchen scales and weigh it before and after feeding and subtract it to see its milk intake. There is an additional benefit to weighing the animal, as you can then monitor and chart its weight gain with time and thus confirm that it has a steady increase as it grows.

Progressive weight gain and content puppies/kittens are a good indication that you are doing a good job.

If the orphan is too weak to suckle, there are stomach tubes available in which milk can be syringe fed to the orphan. This sounds difficult but is an easy skill to master with some assistance from a clinic staff member and it is a rapid method of feeding compared to a teat and bottle..

## **GENERAL CARE.**

Orphaned pups and kittens will need help toileting for the first few weeks as this is usually done by the bitch/queen. After feeding gently stroke the genital area with a soft damp cloth or tissue to stimulate urination and defecation. Do not be concerned if the pup/kit does not defecate after each milk feed as fecal volume is small until they start to consume solids. Assisted toileting may be discontinued once the pup/kit is able to eliminate on its own.

General cleanliness is also important so wipe away any residue milk, food on it's face and body as again this would ordinarily be conducted by the bitch/queen.

## **WEANING**

Pups and kits are ready to start weaning at around four and a half weeks of age.

A suitable food to start weaning with is moistened puppy/kitten biscuits the consistency of sloppy weet-bix. This is best achieved using warm water. Alternatively use jellymeat.

Place a small amount of food with the pups/kits on a flat dish. Initially the food will be used more as a play toy but initially it will start to be consumed. Encourage eating by placing small amounts in their mouths. As more solid food is consumed the amount of milk given should be reduced to effect the transition.

The weaning process should take one to two weeks to complete and the puppy/kitten should then be on 3 - 4 set meals per day/

Equipment needed:

- measuring cup
- nursing bottle
- teats
- milk powder
- scales
- stomach tube
- syringes
- worming tablets
- bedding

Tube / bottle feeding guide to feed puppies & kittens:

Puppies : approx. 4 ml per 100 gram of body weight over a 24 hr period.

Kittens : approx. 6 ml per 100 gram of body weight over a 24 hr period.

i.e. a 400 gram puppy will need  $4 * 4 = 16$  ml over a 24 hour period  
which is 2mls every 3 hours. (16mls divided over 8 feeds every 3 hrs.)