

KITTEN SEASON

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Kitten season is here; it is that bittersweet time when cats, which are seasonal reproducers start giving birth to 4,5, 7 or more kittens. The shelters are full; the rescues are full and fosters are needed and in high demand.

Kitten season as cute as all these kittens are, is also a very hard time for everybody involved. Too many homeless kittens are left to fend for themselves in the streets or are brought to shelters and because they are underage and without a mother, they are euthanized.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

The first and most important way to help is to SPAY AND NEUTER your pets; tell friends and neighbors to do the same. Educate people that female cats can start having kittens when they are 4 months and they will reproduce often when the days are longer and the temperature is warm.

You can volunteer with a TNR (Trap, Neuter & Release) group to keep the feral and stray cats' populations in your neighborhood under control and avoid illnesses.

If you don't have the time to volunteer, you can donate to Rescues and Shelters. This is the time when they desperately need your help. They need food, supplies for the kittens and the mommies; and they need your time too.

You can help by becoming a Foster parent for a Rescue or Shelter and helping those kittens that are orphans.

If you see kittens, try your very best to find the mother. The mother usually takes very good care of them. If they are very young, do not bring them to the shelter. Find a Rescue, find a foster or if you can, keep them until they are 8 weeks old before bringing them to the Shelter. Underage kittens do not have a chance at the shelter, they are euthanized almost immediately.

Most kittens in the streets have bacterial infections; the most common is Upper Respiratory Infections (URI). If you see a kitten with swollen or inflamed eyes, discharge from eyes and/or nose, trap the kitten and take it to the nearest animal hospital or veterinarian. If not treated early, it can result in permanent blindness or the loss of the eyes.

IF YOU FIND KITTENS.... STOP AND WAIT!

The first reaction is to help and take the kittens; but it is very important to know whether they are really orphans or the mother is off getting food.

Do not grab the kittens right away. The mother might be off trying to get food or finding a new place to relocate her kittens. Stand away, if possible, approx. 30 feet or return a bit later, the mother might not approach the kittens if she feels or see humans around them.

Also, don't take the kittens right away thinking that you can use them to trap the mother... she will hardly fall for that because if she senses danger, she will abandon the kittens.

Of course, you need to check the surroundings... is there a heavy traffic street close by? Are the kittens in danger because of other wild animals or dogs? You need to remember that the mother may take several hours before returning and the kittens can usually survive for that period of time.

MORE IMPORTANT THAN FOOD IS THE BODY TEMPERATURE OF THE KITTENS. Are the kittens warm? Is it cold outside? NEONATAL KITTENS ARE MORE AT RISK OF DYING OF HYPOTHERMIA THAN NOT HAVING ANYTHING TO EAT. If it is summer and the temperature is warm, you can wait a bit longer before retrieving the kittens if the mother does not show up.

If you can trap mother and kittens, then do that! They will need shelter and food and also the mother will go into heat few weeks after having the kittens and while nursing. It is very important to spay her as soon as possible.

If the mother does not come back, then you should retrieve the kittens. At this point, your action would be crucial for the kittens' survival, especially if they are neonatal.

WHAT TO DO IF KITTENS ARE NEONATAL:

Prepare to bottle-feed and take proper care of the kittens. This will be an involved process. Neonatal kittens are very difficult to care for and have a high mortality rate. They require frequent feedings of kitten milk replacement formula day and night, and many simply 'fail to thrive' without the care of the mother.

Check if kittens are warm at all time. This is super important, even more than feeding. Kittens cannot regulate their body temperature...How to tell kittens are cold? If the pads in their paws and/or ears are cold, the kittens are cold. Put your finger in one of the kitten's mouth, if it feels cold, the kitten temperature IS TOO low. You have to take action immediately. You need to warm up the kitten slowly by wrapping it in a baby or soft blanket, hold it close to your body and rub him/her with your warm hands.

Never feed a cold kitten, it cannot digest properly if the body temperature is low. Never recline a kitten for feeding. It can cause aspiration, meaning the kitten inhales the formula in its respiratory tract. Aspiration can lead to pneumonia and be fatal.

It has been proven that kittens that are bottle-fed will develop more aggression when older. The reason why is that they are lacking the grooming from their mother. In order to help with this issue, grab a damp, warm washcloth and give the kitten short strokes to mimic the mother's grooming after feeding them.

Neonatal kittens need to be fed every 2 to 3 hours, depending on how old they are. Do not feed neonatal kittens COW'S OR GOAT'S MILK. It will give them life-threatening diarrhea. They need the special formulated kitten milk with all the supplements that are added to it. Powdered kitten milk replacement formula is better than the liquid formula. It will prevent diarrhea. Make sure the formula is fresh and not rancid and past expiration date.

After you feed them, you will need to help them eliminate. You stimulate them with a damp washcloth and by rubbing their genitals.

Ideally, the kittens should remain with their mother until they are 12 weeks of age. The Queen is in charge to teach them skills, how to properly play and not be overly-aggressive. This may not be possible, if the kittens are from a feral mother. Do not try to confine or house a feral mother cat, if she is not willing... it can be dangerous. Some of them are willing to accept human help when they have kittens and/or sick kittens.



Picture by ASPCA.