

Help orphaned kittens with these tips

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The clement weather this winter has brought kitten season early to Tillamook County, but nights can still be frosty and put orphaned kittens at risk of a cruel death. Here are some tips to give orphaned kittens a fighting chance until you can get them to a veterinarian.

First, are you sure the kittens are orphans? If they're plump, clean, and sleeping contentedly, probably Mom isn't far away. (An act of kindness would be to leave food and water for her, then have her spayed as soon as her kittens are weaned.) If the kittens are dirty and meowing, chances are Mom has been killed, and these kittens need your help immediately.

❶ Bring the kittens indoors to a draft-free, warm room. Isolate them from any other animals in case of illness. Place them in a box with bedding. Warmth is essential for all mammal babies. The following all work: a heating pad set on low; plastic drinks bottles filled with tap-hot water stuffed into old socks, then laid front and back of each kitten; a hot water bottle wrapped in a towel. Check water temperatures frequently, and make sure the kittens can crawl away from the heat to an unheated spot in case they become overheated. Keeping orphan kittens warm is possibly the most important thing you can do for them.

❷ Don't feed cold kittens; they can't digest when cold. Wait until they've warmed up. Do not feed cow's milk! It causes diarrhea and contains no

goodness. If you can't get to a store or a veterinarian for proper kitten formula (which they must have or they will die), at a pinch you can feed human baby formula at twice the strength, or five percent sugar water every couple of hours; both should be room temperature. A few drops in a sterilized plastic dropper or plastic syringe every hour or so is better than nothing.

Be careful how you feed a kitten. Think how kittens feed from their mothers. They lie on their tummies, not on their backs; so don't be tempted to feed them the way you would a human baby—they could choke. Preferably sit cross-legged on the floor with a towel over you (keep that pinafore for this purpose only, to avoid cross-contamination), place the kitten between your knees facing you, then gently pry his lips apart with the tip of your finger and insert just the tip of the dropper or syringe. You're mimicking the mother's teet, so don't push the syringe or dropper into the mouth. The kitten should start sucking, so you can gently squeeze the bulb of the dropper or gently depress the syringe plunger. Kittens can suck liquid into their lungs, so hold the syringe or dropper at a 45-degree angle and go very slowly. If a kitten starts to choke, hold him upside-down until he coughs up. Don't over-feed. If the kitten starts making bubbles or his tummy looks round, that's enough. A little often is infinitely better than a lot all at once. If a kitten refuses to suckle, rub his forehead or stroke his back, which mimics

what his mother would do. If the kitten still refuses to eat, at least keep him warm and patiently keep trying, but don't force food into him.

❸ After feeding, burp the kitten by placing her over your shoulder and tapping her back lightly. Then help her eliminate by gently stimulating her bottom with a Q-tip moistened with warm water so it doesn't chafe. Remember, you're a mother cat substitute, and mother cats lick their kittens' bottoms to get them to "go."

❹ Now clean the kitten all over, as Mom would do. A warm, slightly damp flannel rubbed all over the kitten's body, especially bottom and mouth, will mimic Mom's tongue. Don't wet the kitten. If you do, you can use a hair dryer on low from a distance that won't burn.

❺ Place a towel over the box of kittens to keep it extra cozy, then let the kittens sleep a couple of hours.

❻ Change bedding frequently.

❼ Keep checking on your orphans until you can get them to a veterinarian.

If a kitten dies, don't beat yourself up about it. You did your best. The kitten may have been ill or you may have found him too late. At least he didn't perish in the cold and wet or was eaten alive by a predator.

Under the Resources tab at the United Paws' website, www.unitedpaws.org, in the "Helpful Documents" section is more detailed information entitled "Kitten Rescue" with a goat's milk recipe for kitten formula.

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Donations in any amount to help cats and dogs like Oma are

always welcome at United Paws of Tillamook County, POB 159, Tillamook, OR 97141. Donations are tax-deductible as law allows. United Paws is a 501(c)(3) volunteer-based nonprofit and is the only spay/neuter group serving Tillamook County. Last year we spayed and neutered 1,027 cats and dogs who would otherwise not have been sterilized.

To see other pets like Oma for adoption, visit www.unitedpaws.org. For more information, call 503-842-5663.