



How to Bottle Feed Kittens and Puppies

Kittens and puppies who are between 0-4 weeks of age need bottle feeding if they are orphans or if they have mothers who do not have enough milk or do not have any milk. Mothers who need our help getting more milk into their babies should still be allowed to stay with their kittens and puppies and take care of them, provided they are not rejecting them or hurting them.

Bottle feeding kittens and puppies can be fun and rewarding, yet frustrating at times. The bottle feeding process should be easier for foster caregivers who have a good understanding of how to properly do each step.

Getting Everything Ready: 9 Easy Steps

1) Weigh your Kitten or Puppy

- You do not need to do this before every feeding, once daily is enough.
- For kittens and smaller puppies, this can be done with a baby scale, a postage scale, or a kitchen scale. For larger puppies, a bathroom scale will be needed.

2) Use the Maddie's Bottle Feeding and Stomach Capacity Chart

- Once you have a weight on your foster kitten or puppy, look at either the [Maddie's Kitten Bottle Feeding and Stomach Capacity Chart](#) or the [Maddie's Puppy Bottle Feeding and Stomach Capacity Chart](#) to figure out how much milk your foster kitten or puppy should be getting per day, how often to feed, and how much milk you should be giving per feeding.
- These charts are only meant to be used as a guideline to help avoid overfeeding or underfeeding, adjustments may be needed for your individual foster kitten or puppy based on how he or she is doing.
- On the first day of bottle feeding, it is recommended to only feed half of the amount listed on the bottle feeding chart. This will give your kitten's or puppy's digestive system time to adjust to the milk replacer, and for the stomach to adapt to the volume of milk being fed.



3) Select the Milk Replacer

- It is acceptable to temporarily use homemade milk replacer. For “How-To” instructions, see the [Maddie’s Orphaned Kitten Emergency Milk Replacer Recipes](#) or the [Maddie’s Orphaned Puppy Emergency Milk Replacer Recipes](#).
- Commercial kitten or puppy milk replacer should be obtained as soon as possible, as it more closely matches the mother’s milk nutritionally. Commercial milk replacer comes in liquid form in a can, which is more expensive, and in powder form, which needs to be mixed with water to make a liquid.

4) Select the Bottle and Nipple

- Find an appropriate sized bottle and nipple to use. You should use the 2 oz. bottle and nipple for kittens and the 4 oz. bottle and nipple for small to medium breed puppies. Human baby bottles that are angled and vented work best for large breed puppies such as Labradors, Mastiffs, and Pit Bulls.
- Use caution if using larger nipples for kittens and smaller puppies. If they happen to chew off part of the tip of the nipple and swallow it, larger nipples are more likely to cause an obstruction of the intestines.
- The nipple’s tip should not extend past the middle of your kitten’s or puppy’s tongue. Avoid nipples that are too long. If the tip of the nipple is too far back in the mouth, the milk may be inhaled, aka aspirated, down the trachea and into the lungs instead of going down the esophagus into the stomach.
- Feeding with a syringe or dropper should be avoided, because you may accidentally put more milk into your kitten’s or puppy’s mouth than he or she can swallow, which could also cause aspiration of the milk.

5) Prepare the Nipple

- The nipples on human baby bottles come with holes already in the tips, but the nipples on pet nursing bottles do not. They need appropriate sized holes cut in the tips.
- For the 2 oz. nursing bottle nipples for kittens, you can poke a hole in the tip of the nipple with a hot sewing needle.
- For either the 2 oz. or 4 oz. nipples, you can cut an “X” shape in the tip of the nipple. Small scissors such as embroidery scissors or cuticle scissors work well, especially for the smaller nipples. Avoid cutting too far down on the tip of the nipple, this can make the hole too big.



- After you have made a hole in the nipple, you need to check that it is not too big or too small. Hold the nursing bottle upside down. The hole in the nipple should be large enough to allow a drop of milk to slowly form. The milk should drip out at a rate of 1-2 drops per second with a gentle squeeze of the bottle.

6) Mix the Milk Replacer

- Most powdered kitten and puppy milk replacers are mixed up by adding 1 part powder to 2 parts water. Be sure to read the mixing directions on the label of the powdered milk replacer that you are using. You can mix the milk replacer with Pedialyte® instead of water and add in a pinch of the probiotic powder FortiFlora® for the first few feedings to help your kitten's or puppy's digestive system adjust to the milk replacer.
- A temporary 50:50 dilution of milk replacer is sometimes needed. To make a 50:50 dilution of milk replacer, you either take the liquid milk replacer that comes in a can or the powdered milk replacer that you have already mixed up, and you add an equal part of that milk replacer to an equal part of water or Pedialyte®.

7) Measure out the Milk Replacer

- Carefully measuring out the milk replacer needed for one feeding helps reduce wasted milk replacer.
- Milk that has already been warmed up or in a bottle that has touched a kitten's or puppy's mouth must be discarded. Warm milk or milk that has been contaminated with bacteria from saliva is a good breeding ground for unwanted bacteria.
- A clean syringe is a good choice for measuring out the milk replacer.

8) Warm the Milk Replacer

- Avoid warming the milk up in the microwave, this can lead to overheating or uneven heating.
- Warm the milk by placing it in a warm water bath. You can warm the water bath in the microwave, then soak the milk in the water bath for a few minutes, or however long it takes to warm the milk up to about 95-100°F. Gently swirl the milk in the container every few minutes to warm it all the way through, otherwise the center may still be cold. Avoid shaking the milk in the container, this causes bubbles to form, and you do not want your kitten or puppy to swallow air while nursing.
- The nipples can be stiff on some bottles. You can also put the nipple in the warm water bath to soften it.



- Make sure that the milk is neither too hot nor too cold by testing a few drops on the inside of your wrist before feeding.

9) Warm your Kitten or Puppy

- Kittens and puppies who are chilled tend to be less responsive and not interested in nursing. You may notice that they are crying continuously.
- Kittens and puppies who are chilled must be warmed up slowly, so that they do not go into shock. To warm your kitten or puppy, use a Snuggle Safe® disc, hot water bottles, or warmed rice packs.
- Be sure to wrap the heat source in a towel or blanket to slow down warming, and so that your kitten or puppy does not get burned.
- If your kitten or puppy is very cold with a body temperature less than 95°F, the warming process should happen slowly over a 30 minute to 2-hour time period, with a body temperature increase of approximately 2°F per hour.

From Feeding to Clean-up: 6 Easy Steps

1) Properly Position your Kitten or Puppy

- Kittens and puppies who are being bottle fed should not be positioned on their backs like human babies who are being bottle fed, despite the numerous photos and videos on the internet that show that! Improper positioning can cause inhalation (aspiration) of milk or swallowing of air.
- A kitten or puppy being bottle fed should be held with his or her feet facing down to the ground. This is called a sternal position. The head and neck should be stretched upward and forward, like the position your kitten or puppy would naturally be in while nursing from his or her mother.
- Do not allow the kitten or puppy to extend his or her neck too far back.

2) Feed your Kitten or Puppy

- Allow a drop of milk to drip onto your kitten's or puppy's tongue. He or she should latch on quickly, but it may take a few attempts before he or she figures it out.
- Do not squeeze the bottle and stream milk into your kitten's or puppy's mouth, this may cause him or her to aspirate the milk.
- Go slowly, allowing your kitten or puppy time to breathe and swallow. Check for swallowing by watching and/or gently feeling the throat for movement.



- Care should be taken to ensure that your kitten or puppy does not swallow air. This can happen when he or she is suckling too fast, is in an improper feeding position, or when air bubbles get into the nipple.
- When your kitten or puppy has a strong suckle, be sure that he or she does not chew the nipple off while nursing. If swallowed, a piece of nipple can obstruct the intestines.

3) Burp your Kitten or Puppy

- Just like human babies, kittens and puppies need to be burped after bottle feeding.
- Hold your kitten or puppy with his or her tummy against your shoulder or the palm of your hand, and then gently pat and rub his or her back. For very young kittens and puppies, who are more delicate, softly rubbing the back is recommended over patting.
- If he or she does not burp, move on to the next step, and try again later.

4) Stimulate your Kitten or Puppy to Pee and Poop

- Kittens and puppies cannot pee and poop by themselves until they are about 3-4 weeks old. Those who have a mother will be stimulated to pee and poop when she is grooming them and licking their rear ends. So, with kittens and puppies who do not have a mother, we must stimulate them to pee and poop by rubbing a warm wet cotton square on their bottoms.
- For “How-To” instructions, see the Maddie’s flash class on [How to Stimulate an Orphaned Kitten or Puppy to Pee and Poop](#).

5) Refrigerate Leftover Milk Replacer

- Milk replacer must be refrigerated between uses.
- Milk replacer should be stored in a clean container with a cover in the refrigerator for no longer than 24 hours. This includes opened cans of liquid milk replacer that do not require mixing powder with water.
- Throw out any milk replacer that is left out at room temperature for longer than 1 hour, has been previously warmed up, or has been contaminated with saliva from your kitten or puppy.

6) Clean and Sterilize the Bottle and Nipple

- Wash the bottle and nipple with dish soap and warm water.
- Then sterilize the bottle and nipple by boiling them in water for 10 minutes. This should be done before the first use and between litters, but this does not have to be done between every feeding within the same litter. Once every 24-48 hours should be sufficient in that case.



- After they are sterilized, set the bottle and nipple on a clean towel to dry. Be sure to tap out the water droplets from the inside of the nipple and bottle.

