

## Raising Kittens

Your cat is expecting kittens. How exciting! Raising kittens can be a highly rewarding and enjoyable experience. What should you expect? What will you need to make sure the little tikes grow up happy, healthy and strong?

Let's start from day one. Most likely, you walk in and find your cat already nursing her new litter. As there will be a bit of a mess where she is, you will want to move her and her kittens somewhere clean and safe. Mother cats prefer a darkened den, so putting a blanket over her box and lining it with nice clean bedding will do nicely for a nursery. The nursery should be set up in a quiet area, away from traffic. Too much noise and light can upset a mother cat and she may try to move her kittens if she doesn't feel her they are safe. A sad fact is that sometimes there are one or two dead kittens born along with the live ones. Remove them immediately along with the rest of the birthing mess. The mother will be unlikely to show any interest them.

For the first few days the mother will be constantly with her kittens. They need warmth and frequent feedings at this time which doesn't leave much time for socializing. By the time they are approximately a week old their need for very warm temperatures will begin to reduce. The mother will begin to leave them alone for longer and longer periods. They will begin to huddle up together for warmth. If you peek into the nursery and find a ball of kittens sleeping peacefully, rest assured they are doing just fine. Kittens will sleep nearly all the time for their first two weeks. If the kittens are crying constantly then they are ill or not getting enough milk. Call your vet immediately. Ill or starving kittens can die very quickly without your help.

Assuming that kittens and mother are all healthy and content, you will need to do very little during the first month. The kittens' care will rest primarily in their mothers' capable paws. Normally, kitten eyes will open in seven to fourteen days. If they stay shut for longer than that call your vet. Kittens often get a mild eye infection. The infection results in the eyelids being gummed shut. A cotton ball that has been moistened with warm water should be all you'll need to open the eyes again. If a kitten gets this eye infection keep a close on her. The infection could build up behind those glued shut eyelids and damage the eyeball. The infection usually clears up by itself in a few days. If it turns particularly severe, take the kitten to your vet.

At about one month of age, the kittens should toddle around pretty well and will want to start eating solid food. You may find one of your little tikes standing in his mothers' food dish trying out the food. You will want to put down a plate of a good quality kitten food for them to nibble on. Kitten food is formulated specifically for the needs of growing kittens, where adult food is not. Poor nutrition while the kittens are growing could result in health issues when they become adults. The trick will be keeping the mother out of the kitten food. Most adults find kitten food absolutely delicious.

The first planned visit to the veterinarian for vaccinations should come at about two months of age. By about 3 months of age the kittens should pretty independent and ready to move to their new home if you are planning to sell or give them away. I've given a general overview here. For a normal healthy litter and mother these guidelines should serve you well. If there are any issues, rely on your vet to let you know the

best thing to

do in any situation. Enjoy your kittens while they are with you. They grow up so amazingly fast!