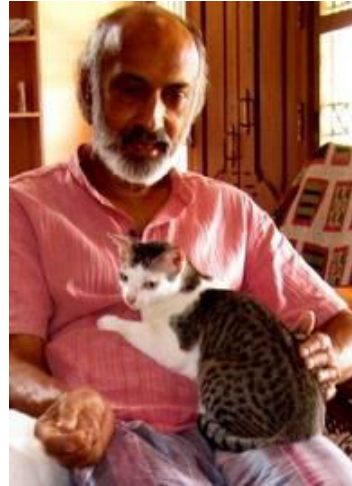


BOTTLE-FEEDING TINY KITTIES

At Coimbatore Puppy Palace with Girija Nair



Michie before



Michie after, with Mohan

What a satisfaction to help someone as fragile as a motherless kitten grow up into a happy cat!

When they are over four weeks of age, you'll find most kittens ready for solid food. Check out their teeth! Wow, you may not have noticed what's going on in this little mouth! However, they still like their milk for sure, and will stay better hydrated if they get milk, too, as they are still learning about water. Their ability to pick up licking as opposed to sucking varies. I have had six-week-old kittens who are still clueless about licking milk from a bowl in an efficient way. Many kittens like curd and find it more easily digested. Cow's milk is often better to offer diluted than whole, as found in toned packaged milk. Some cats aren't keen for milk at all but will take curd. Others reject both, but that's rare. We prefer to buy milk for cats over 4 weeks from people with their own backyard cows, not factory dairies, and do not dilute or medicate their animals. This is basically organic milk.

With kittens under four weeks, the "magic" number is 19. Get your kitten up to age about 19 days and it very likely will be strong enough to survive with good care.

As you may well be aware, cow's milk is not a good food for little kittens under four weeks. It is hard to digest and doesn't have the right composition. Goat's milk is much better, but try to find someone with goats willing to sell a little on a daily basis!! Powdered milk replacer made especially for kittens is the best. You'll likely find it's an imported product. Go to a high-end animal clinic or pet store and they should have it or order it for you. It will produce strong, healthy kittens, despite its artificial look. Twice as much water is added to any measure of milk powder. Don't make too much as it only should be used

for 24 hours. Don't use human baby milk bottles; they are too big. Proper small kitten bottles are sold in shops that carry the powder. In lieu of these, use a regular syringe available at any drug store.

I refrigerate any leftover milk in a metal container that can be warmed on a stove. When you warm it you must put your finger in the milk from the start and not let it get really warm. Just take the chill off. In the second it takes to remove it from the heat you will have the right temperature. Temperature is very important; it should resemble the warmth level coming from a mommy's body, and should never be cool. **KEEP THE MILK BOTTLE WASHED AND CLEAN** after every feeding. This is very important to prevent bacteria from growing on its insides. Purists with time like to boil it; mine have survived without this.

Using Powdered Kitten Milk

This powdered milk should be handled carefully. Check the expiration date. Keep in the refrigerator's freezer compartment to lengthen its life. Never use expired milk or milk stored just in a cupboard after it has been opened. Never use powder that has formed balls inside the container, which indicates that the scoop was stored or put inside not dry. If you use this scoop to add water to the powder, it must be dried absolutely thoroughly before putting it back inside the container. If you change brands or switch to a puppy powdered milk be aware that you may see the change reflected in runny stools. The kittens will get over this eventually, but it shows how sensitive they are to their food. Likewise, if they go from mom's milk to powdered milk, their stools will go through this transition period.

To successfully raise a baby kitten under four weeks you need the following:

- 1) **Time, patience, and persistence.** You must feed these little ones every four hours. I cannot feed at night without becoming a sleep-deprived monster the next day, but if they are under two weeks like the baby I show in the photo above (who turned into a gorgeous cat!), you may want to shorten your sleep time by an hour or two and feed every three hours during the day for the first two weeks. Its cage or box should have one side open, a towel inside, and a small shallow plastic box containing sand or, better, wood chips or shavings. If you cover the towel with paper towels or hospital pads or a combination, you can extend the "life" of the towel before it needs washing. When feeding, sometimes the baby will seem like it is rejecting the bottle when it is just too excited from the smell of milk to hold the nipple in one place or it is not finding the right place for it in its mouth. Just hang in there with it and its need will find a way.
- 2) **Gentleness:** The distance between the mouth and the nose of little ones is very small. Go slowly when trying to insert the bottle in the mouth and be sure you don't squirt milk into the nose, which can cause big respiratory problems. Likewise, don't squirt too much milk into the mouth so that it backs up into the tiny nose. Let the kitten draw as much as it needs from the bottle and don't force a lot in at once out of anxiety to get the kitten drinking. A little pumping of the bottle with your fingers can encourage drinking sometimes but be very cautious. When the sucking really locks in and your kitten is obviously in "the zone," you can put a little continuous pressure on the bottle as it nears empty.

- 3) **Awareness:** Watching what's going on will tell you what to do. If the kitten is having a hard time getting milk out of the bottle, it may just be that you are holding it level instead of that approximately 20 degree tilt it should be held at to provide gravity flow. The milk may not be flowing enough. Or the nozzle may be stopped up. Check the latter if the kitten seems to be having a hard time getting the milk out.

More Pointers for Successful Feeding

You can warm up leftover milk just once before it has to be thrown. The big trick in feeding babies is to (1) slip the nipple along their "smile line" until the mouth opens for it. Don't poke the mouth aggressively to get nipple in. (2) Let kitty adjust the nipple in its mouth until it is comfortable. This may feel like rejection but is just experimentation. (3) Nipple must always be on a slant into mouth. If it is level or below, kitty will seem to reject it. (4) Put slight to moderate pressure on the bottle to increase ease of sucking. Again, MOST IMPORTANT: Don't force so much milk through that it can back up into the kitty's nose or that, if the nipple slips out of the mouth, that the milk will shoot into the nose by mistake. Nose and mouth are so close together on these little ones that this takes extra care. SERIOUS pneumonia-like conditions can arise from misfeeding like this, and a tiny weakened kitty can actually die easily from this cause.

You'll know you've overfed if **runny stools** start showing before next feeding or overnight. Some kittens would like to drink until they look like fur balls! The temptation is there to give them what they want and avoid having to feed so often, but feeding the **right amount** every three or four hours is a must. They usually will stop feeding when they have had adequate intake. But some piggies will keep on feeding. You can quit when that tummy is in danger of going from pleasantly round, slightly bulging and full to major bulging and an out-of-proportion look.

Don't really shake bottle before feeding to mix up leftover milk. **Swirling milk** is better because shaking will put tiny bubbles in milk. Not good.

(4) When I warm up leftover milk I stir it in a steel mug over the fire with my little finger just until all the chill is gone. A matter of six seconds or so. As previously mentioned, by the time you remove it from the stove it will gain just a tad more warmth, making it the perfect temperature to pour into the bottle and immediately feed.

I find some kittens really like a feeding position where you lay the kit's tummy on your chest so all the paws are braced, and you slip the bottle right along your body into the mouth. There's a lot of control that way. Other kittens won't care so much what the position is as long as that milk gets to them! Each kitty has its own preference, which can also change.



Michie at four weeks

If your kitten prefers to feed away from your body, hold kitten firmly in your left hand. Thumb and index fingers are very useful to extend as braces for kitty's front paws. Some kits so much need this brace that they won't suck unless bracing is possible. (6) When kitten is "in the groove," sucking-wise, it will be perfectly still and stare straight ahead, intensely concentrating. Let it continue that way until it breaks the "spell" itself. Then you can put it back in its carrier or feed the rest of the kits, giving it a second chance at a "top off" when the others are finished. The size of the tummy determines if it has had enough. As mentioned, it should be really round and bulging but not look like it's going to burst! Don't force a kit to drink too much and don't think a kit that is rejecting the nipple at first just doesn't want to drink. Each has a different style and some take longer to get the nipple at the right position for long-term sucking.

Remember that if sometimes a kitty is having trouble sucking, the nipple hole may be clogged, so check it. Kitties about 2 weeks old will be sucking over an inch of milk a session if measured on the side of the bottle ... maybe considerably more, and it varies at times and with individual kittens.

Watching a kit well positioned and satisfied with its bottle is a lovely activity. Happy sucking!!!! (Note in these pix that our feeding person has not given "bracing fingers" nicely, but in one photo you can see the need as the kitten reaches out for the bottle/mommy.)