



3100 Cherry Hill Road • Ann Arbor, MI 48105
734-662-5585 • www.hshv.org

Tube Feeding Kittens

***You must make sure kitten is warmed appropriately before any attempts to feed. Normal body temperature is as follows:

- 0-2 weeks old: 95-99F
- 2-4 weeks old: 97-101F
- Over 4 weeks: 100-102F

Kittens can be tube feed from birth up to around 2 pounds although once teeth come in at 4-5 weeks old, need to make sure they don't bite holes in the feeding tube.

Supplies Needed:

- Clean feeding tube (usually red rubber)
- Syringe that attaches to feeding tube (3cc, 5cc, 10cc usually depending upon amount being fed)
- Milk replacer such as KMR or Breeders Edge
- Small towels/washcloths to clean up milk and to stimulate kitten to urinate or defecate.

Link to tube feeding tutorial video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qKjuNt_JuRI

or just search for kitten tube feeding videos as there are several good ones.

Feeding Steps:

1. Prepare your supplies and milk replacer. If milk replacer is a powder, mix following directions (usually 2 parts water to 1 part powder) and mix well to prevent powder clumps which can clog tube. Make sure milk replacer is warm, but not hot. Think of the warmth of a Mama Cat's body (around 100F). Too cold and kitten loses heat and gets diarrhea. Too warm and you burn the stomach. Test on the back of your hand just before feeding to make sure it hasn't cooled off.
2. Choose clean, appropriately sized feeding tube. Usually 5Fr for kittens under 0.5lbs (8oz) and 8Fr for larger kittens. You can use 5Fr on larger kittens, it just takes longer to feed.
3. Measure distance from tip of kittens nose to the last rib (stomach area) and mark this measurement on feeding tube with a Sharpie pen. This gives you an idea of how far you need to push in the tube to get to the stomach.
4. Weigh the kitten.
5. Attach appropriate sized syringe to feeding tube. If using 8Fr red rubber tube, you will need to cut the end of the tube where the syringe attaches since it is flared to accept a larger tipped syringe. You want the syringe tip to fit snuggly onto the tube. NEVER cut the round tipped end of the tube that goes into the kitten. The tube will seem longer than needed, but that's okay.

6. With syringe attached to tube, dip end of tube into milk replacer and fill tube and syringe with appropriate amount of milk for this feeding. You want to fill feeding tube with milk so you aren't filling stomach with extra air and are giving full feeding to kitten since some of the milk will remain in the tube after syringe is empty.

**Amount per feeding = 1cc(ml) of milk replacer for every ounce of body weight. When they get to 8 ounces, you can feed 1.5cc/ounce {Ex. 4 ounce kitten gets 4cc per feeding}.

7. Dip the tip of feeding tube in milk to act as lubricant and to give kitten taste of milk to encourage swallowing.

8. Place kitten on a surface at a convenient height on the belly (normal position as if it was nursing from Mom). Gently open the mouth by pressing down on front of lower jaw with your index finger (right if right handed) and hold jaw open with thumb and index finger of left hand place gently around kittens head at corners of mouth. Slowly thread feeding tube into middle of kittens' mouth. You may feel some resistance at back of throat, but once kitten swallows, tube should pass easier.

9. Pass tube down until the Sharpie line on the tube gets to the front of the mouth.

- IF you can't pass the tube that far, you may be in the lungs.
- IF the kitten isn't crying or making any noise, you may be in the lungs.
- IF the kitten is coughing, you may be in the lungs
- If you observe any of these concerns, take the tube out and try again.

Once you are comfortable you are in the stomach, slowly depress the syringe and feed over 10-30 seconds depending upon the amount. **If kitten starts coughing or any milk comes out the nose, STOP feeding and remove tube.**

Kittens will cry and struggle when being feed, that is okay.

10. When finished feeding, kink the tube and remove slowly.

11. Clean up kitten and stimulate kitten to urinate or defecate if needed. Wash feeding tube and syringe in warm water and soap to prepare for next feeding. Can be re-used as long as not dirty or wearing out. Same tube can be used for multiple kittens in a group.

❖ Feed kittens every 3 hours during the day and every 4 hours overnight until they are 3 weeks old and then you can feed every 4 to 5 hours as long as they are gaining and doing well. If the start losing weight or become ill, you may need to feed more often.

If any questions contact the Foster Manager or Shetler Vet Team.