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Transitioning Kittens and Puppies to Solid Food

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Photo courtesy of the Humane Society for
Southwest Washington, Vancouver, WA

Thank you for joining us to learn about transitioning kittens and puppies to solid food...

Learning Goals

- To help foster caregivers understand when it is time to start weaning kittens and puppies
- To teach foster caregivers techniques to transition kittens and puppies to solid food
- To educate foster caregivers about special considerations for weaning orphaned kittens and puppies
- To help foster caregivers understand common challenges when transitioning kittens and puppies to solid food



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Transitioning Kittens and Puppies to Solid Food

Transitioning kittens and puppies to solid food can be amusing, yet messy, and sometimes challenging. This class should make the weaning process easier, especially for foster caregivers who are trying to wean kittens or puppies for the first time.

The Learning Goals of this class are...

To help foster caregivers understand when it is time to start weaning kittens and puppies...

To teach them techniques to transition kittens and puppies to solid food...

To educate them about special considerations for weaning orphaned kittens and puppies...and...

To help them understand common challenges when transitioning kittens and puppies to solid food.

When to Begin the Weaning Process

- Kittens and Puppies with mothers
 - 4 weeks of age
- Orphaned Kittens and Puppies
 - 3 weeks of age
 - Milk replacers tend to cause digestive problems and are not as nutritionally complete



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Transitioning Kittens and Puppies to Solid Food

Kittens and puppies with mothers usually start to show an interest in solid foods around 4 weeks of age.

The weaning process should start earlier in orphaned kittens and puppies, around 3 weeks of age. Even the best milk replacers tend to cause digestive problems such as diarrhea and constipation, and they are not as nutritionally complete as a mother's milk. This is why bottle fed orphans grow at a slower rate than kittens and puppies who are fed with their mother's milk. It is best for orphans to transition to a more nutritionally complete solid kitten or puppy food as soon as possible. It is also easier on foster caregivers to be able to cut back on, and eventually eliminate, bottle feeding their orphaned babies!

Selection of the Food

- Throughout the weaning process, use the same high quality food
 - Highly digestible
 - Formulated for kitten or puppy growth: approved by AAFCO
- Canned Food
 - Smooth consistency without chunks



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Throughout the weaning process, it is best to use the same high quality food that you plan to feed your kitten or puppy after weaning, to minimize diet changes. It should be highly digestible and formulated for kitten or puppy growth. In addition, it should be approved by the Association of American Feed Control Officials as a complete and balanced diet for growth. Look for the AAFCO nutritional adequacy statement on the food label.

Canned food selected should be of a smooth consistency without chunks. This makes it easier to mix it with water or milk replacer to form a gruel. Royal Canin® products are a good choice, Babycat Instinctive for kittens and Starter Mousse for puppies.

Selection of the Food

- Dry Food
 - Small kibbles, easily rehydrated
 - Crushed dry kitten or puppy food



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Dry food should be small kibbles that are easy for a kitten or puppy to chew and are easily rehydrated with water to make a mushy consistency. Again, Royal Canin® products are a good choice, Mother & Babycat for kittens and Mini Starter Mother & Babydog for puppies. If the kibbles are not already small and easy to chew, they can be crushed up into smaller pieces.

Selection of the Food

- Avoiding diet changes helps prevent digestive upset and/or diet rejection
- Best not to use
 - Temporary weaning diets (“2nd Step” milk replacer products)
- OK to temporarily use if not eating
 - Recovery diets (Hill’s® a/d®, Royal Canin® Recovery®)
 - Human baby food (chicken baby food without onion or garlic)



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Transitioning Kittens and Puppies to Solid Food

Avoiding diet changes helps prevent digestive upset and/or diet rejection.

For this reason, it is best not to use special weaning diets that are designed only for temporary use, such as “2nd step” milk replacer products.

If the kittens and puppies will not eat the food that you plan to feed them after weaning, then it is acceptable to temporarily try adding recovery diets or human baby food to try to get them to eat. Recovery diets include Hill’s® a/d® and Royal Canin® Recovery®, which are prescription diets only available through a veterinarian or the animal shelter or rescue group you are fostering for. If using human baby food, chicken without onion or garlic is the best choice.

Preparation of the Food

- 3-4 ½ weeks
 - Gruel- 2 parts canned food to 1 part milk replacer or water
 - Milk replacer best avoided except for bottle fed babies
 - Gradually cut back on milk replacer or water
 - Start offering fresh water in a shallow bowl
- 4 ½-6 weeks
 - Mushy dry food- 1 part dry food to 3 parts milk replacer or water
 - Milk replacer best avoided except for bottle fed babies
- 6-8 weeks
 - Canned and/or dry
 - No milk replacer or water added



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The preparation of the food depends on the age of the kittens or puppies...

When kittens and puppies are 3 to 4 ½ weeks old, they are just beginning the weaning process. At this time, it is best for solid food to be offered as a thick gruel. A good rule of the thumb is two parts canned food mixed with one part milk replacer or water, but this will vary depending on the thickness of the canned food. The gruel should be the consistency of oatmeal, neither too thick nor thin.

It is best to avoid using milk replacer in gruels, except for babies who have been bottle fed whose stomachs are already used to the milk replacer. Again, diet changes should be kept to a minimum throughout the weaning process. For bottle babies, milk replacer could also be offered in a shallow saucer before attempting to add canned food to it.

Once the kittens or puppies are readily consuming the gruel, start gradually cutting back on the amount of milk replacer or water added. Also, start offering fresh water in a shallow bowl. It is very important for the water intake to increase as the milk consumption decreases so that the kittens and puppies stay well hydrated. Be sure that the water bowl has low sides and is not filled so full of water that there is danger of the kitten or puppy drowning in it or sticking their face so far into the water that they inhale, that is, aspirate it.

By the time kittens and puppies are 4 ½ to 6 weeks old, they are ready for dry food that has been moistened until it is a mushy consistency. A good balance would be one part dry food mixed with three parts of milk replacer or warm water, but it depends on the type of dry food and how easily it is rehydrated. Again, milk replacer is best avoided except for bottle fed babies whose stomachs are already used to it.

At 6-8 weeks of age, kittens and puppies are usually completely weaned and eating solid foods on their own, canned and/or dry, without any milk replacer or water added. They should also be readily drinking water from a bowl at this age.

How to Offer the Food

- Very messy process!
 - Use tarps, sheets, other protective floor covering
 - Put kittens or puppies in a bathtub or shower
 - Have soft washcloths and warm water readily available



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Transitioning Kittens and Puppies to Solid Food

Transitioning kittens and puppies to solid food is a very messy process no matter what! Just like human babies, they often end up wearing more food than they eat. Bibs and high chairs don't work for kittens and puppies, so we have to find other ways to make the clean-up easier. Use tarps, sheets, or other protective floor covering. Even better, place the kittens or puppies in a bathtub or shower that is very easily rinsed out after feedings. Have plenty of soft washcloths and warm water available for wiping down tiny mouths and paws after feeding.

How to Offer the Food

- Early in weaning process
 - Shallow saucers
 - Flat dishes
 - Cookie sheets
 - Place some gruel on lips or tongue
 - Syringe feed small amount gruel (use caution)



Photo courtesy of Greenhill Humane Society, Eugene, OR



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Transitioning Kittens and Puppies to Solid Food

Early in the weaning process, it is best to offer the food in a shallow saucer, a flat dish, or on a cookie sheet, until the kitten or puppy understands what solid food is. Kittens and puppies often learn to eat solids by first stepping in their food and then licking it off their paws. Sometimes it helps to use your finger to place some of the gruel on the kitten's or puppy's lips or tongue, or to syringe feed a small amount of it. Getting a tiny taste of the food is sometimes all that is needed to get them started. This is especially true of orphans who can't learn from watching their mothers eat.

If syringe feeding, use caution. Be sure to only place a very small amount of the gruel on the tongue, do not place it too far back into the mouth, and allow time for swallowing. Otherwise the kitten or puppy could inhale, that is, aspirate, the food.

How to Offer the Food

- Later in weaning process
 - Bowls with shallow sides
 - Avoid bowls that are too large
 - Ceramic hamster bowls for kittens
 - Feeding saucers for puppies
 - Multiple bowls for litters



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Transitioning Kittens and Puppies to Solid Food

Later in the weaning process, after the kittens and puppies have figured out how to eat solid food, bowls with shallow sides are best. Avoid bowls that are too large, so that they don't get stepped in or tipped over. Some people prefer small ceramic hamster bowls for kittens. Feeding saucers work very well for litters of puppies, and they come in different sizes to choose from depending on how big the puppies are. Multiple bowls are a good idea for litters, to avoid crowding and ensure that everyone has ample access to the food.

How to Offer the Food

- **Warmed up**
 - Kittens tend to be picky about the temperature of their food
- **Offer food for 30 minutes, 4 times per day**
 - Milk replacer, gruel or canned food mixtures become dry, hard, unpalatable, and/or spoiled
 - Dry food can be left out all day (except with large breed puppies)
- **Probiotics**
 - Help digestive system adjust to diet changes



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Transitioning Kittens and Puppies to Solid Food

Regardless of the choice of dishes... milk replacer, gruel or canned food mixtures should be warmed up before feeding. This will make the food more enticing, especially for kittens who tend to be pickier than puppies about the temperature of their food. Kittens will often refuse to eat food that has been refrigerated and isn't at least warmed up to room temperature.

Offer food for 30 minutes, 4 times per day. Any leftover milk replacer, gruel, canned food mixtures, or moistened dry food should be discarded. Otherwise it becomes dry, hard, unpalatable, and/or spoiled. Once kittens and puppies are eating non-moistened dry food, it can be left out all day for them to nibble on whenever they get hungry. Large breed puppies are an exception in that they should not be fed free choice, since this can cause abnormalities in their growing bones.

Probiotics such as FortiFlora® help the digestive system adjust to diet changes. They can easily be added to the food that the kittens and puppies are eating, once per day. Probiotics should be started at the beginning of the transition process, and continued for approximately 5 to 10 days.

Ensuring Adequate Nutrition

- Do not discontinue bottle feeding nor prevent nursing, until fully transitioned
 - Offer bottle or access to mother after offering solid food
 - Be patient, the transition process can take a few weeks
- Weigh kittens and puppies daily
 - Monitor for weight loss or lack of weight gain
 - Kittens: Gain 4 oz. per week, or 0.6 oz. per day
 - Puppies: Gain 5-10% of their body weight per day, resulting in doubling their body weight every 10-14 days



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It is very important to ensure adequate nutrition during the transition process. As messy as kittens and puppies are while learning to eat solid foods, it is difficult to tell how much solid food each of them has actually eaten, especially with litters.

Do not completely discontinue bottle feeding nor prevent kittens or puppies from nursing from their mothers until you are sure that they are fully transitioned to solid food. This usually happens by the time they are 6 to 8 weeks of age. After offering solid food, offer a bottle or give them access to the mother to nurse off of, in case they did not get enough food and are still hungry. Be patient, the transition process usually takes a few weeks to complete.

Kittens and puppies should be weighed daily, and closely monitored for weight loss or lack of weight gain. Kittens who are eating enough should be gaining 4 oz. per week, or 0.6 oz. per day. Puppies should be gaining 5-10% of their body weight per day, resulting in doubling their body weight every 10-14 days.



Test Your Knowledge!

Quiz - 4 questions

Last Modified: Jun 05, 2017 at 09:50 AM

PROPERTIES

On passing, 'Finish' button: [Goes to Next Slide](#)

On failing, 'Finish' button: [Goes to Next Slide](#)

Allow user to leave quiz: [At any time](#)

User may view slides after quiz: [At any time](#)

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Edit in Quizmaker



Edit Properties

Conclusion

- Some kittens and puppies need more help with transitioning to solid food than others
- Important to:
 - Know when to begin the weaning process
 - How to select, prepare, and offer the food
 - How to ensure adequate nutrition



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Transitioning Kittens and Puppies to Solid Food

Some kittens and puppies will need more help with transitioning to solid food than others. The process is easier for those who have mothers to watch and mimic, compared to orphans, yet some of the runts of litters may need some extra assistance too. It is helpful for foster caregivers to know when to begin the weaning process in foster kittens and puppies; how to select, prepare and offer the food; and how to ensure that the kittens and puppies are getting adequate nutrition during the weaning process. We hope you will enjoy this sometimes challenging, yet rewarding time in the lives of your foster kittens and puppies!

Thank you for fostering!!!
And special thanks to Dr. Susan Krebsbach for her review



Photo courtesy of Greenhill Humane Society, Eugene, OR



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Thank you for watching and thank you for fostering!! You are making a huge difference in the lives of foster kittens and puppies. We wish you and your foster kittens and puppies all the best!