



BOTTLE FEEDING NEONATES GUIDE

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

If a mother is unwilling or unable to feed her young, it is important that the signs are identified as soon as possible so that care and feeding can be assumed by human caregivers. Always consult with a veterinary team should the mother start neglecting and stops feeding the litter, as she herself may have a problem or disease.

Bottle feeding is achieved by offering a size-appropriate bottle and nipple to deliver commercial milk replacer. This is performed until the neonate has the strength and coordination to eat and drink on its own. Both puppy and kitten formula and bottles can be purchased from most pet stores to provide the appropriate supplies needed to take over the feeding responsibilities from the mother.

The amount of each feeding and number of feedings to be given each day depends on the size and age of the offspring. In very young offspring, they require a feeding upwards of every two hours. This can reduce to every 3-8 hours as they grow.

A gram scale can be used to monitor appropriate growth of neonates. A guide to providing the appropriate meal size according to the weight of the kitten or puppy is generally provided on the back of most formula containers.

There is a risk of aspirating milk replacer into the lungs and subsequently causing pneumonia. Allowing neonates to nurse at their natural speed will help reduce this risk. The most commonly made mistake is purposefully or accidentally squeezing the bottle during a feeding, usually to try to quicken the feeding. If a neonate is wheezing or having trouble breathing at any time after bottle feeding or starts to vomit after feedings, stop feeding and seek veterinary care.

Holding the neonate upright or allowing them to rest on their stomach is appropriate for feeding. Resist the temptation to hold them on their back like a human baby; this often leads to aspiration.

Check neonates each day for dehydration by skin tenting and weighing. If they are dehydrated, they may need more water in their replacer and/or require more feedings per day.

At any time, if you are concerned about the health of one or multiple neonates, it is better to have them checked sooner rather than later.