

## How to Tube Feed Kittens

Tube feeding can be nerve-racking, but it doesn't have to be scary. Keep in mind – most of these kittens would die without our intervention! Instruction and practice with a trained professional are recommended – do not try to tube feed without guidance.

Tube feeding may also seem like a lot of work – but in practice, it's typically more efficient than trying to safely force-feed from a syringe. Performed correctly, the risk of aspiration and complications is lower than with force-feeding, and it's faster (so less stress for you and for the kitten!). Many kittens will also improve after a short period of tube feeding and will begin to take the bottle again once they are stronger, so it is not necessarily a long-term commitment.

There are three ways to verify the tube is placed correctly in order to avoid complications, all of which will be discussed in more detail:

1. Mark the tube prior to placement; measure from the mouth to the level of the last rib. The trachea does not extend this far down, so it is not possible to advance the tube to this level if it is in the trachea.
2. After placement, the kitten is still able to vocalize; if incorrectly placed into the trachea, the kitten will not be able to cry.
3. Administer a tiny volume of water prior to giving formula; if in the trachea, the kitten will cough. A small amount of water into the trachea/lungs is not problematic, but formula into the trachea will be fatal.

### SUPPLIES:

- Feeding tube (red rubber catheter)
- Syringe for formula (3-12mL)
- Syringe for water (3mL)
- Warmed formula, dilute if using smaller tube (3.5Fr)
- Lubricant jelly
- Sharpie
- Towel for wrapping kitten

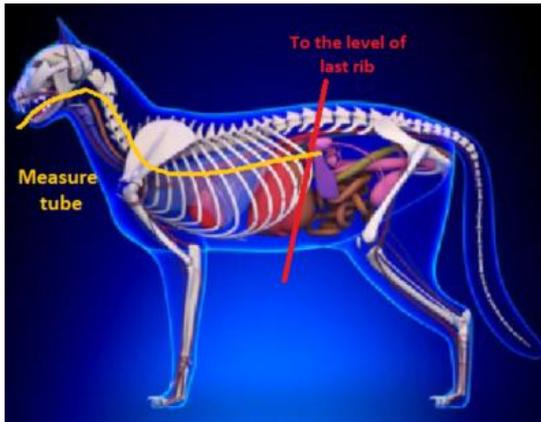


Link to video from American Pets Alive!: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-LoKIZFhkUk>

\*\* in this video, water is not administered first into the tube; this step is recommended as another method to ensure the tube is correctly placed into the esophagus and not into the trachea\*\*

#### HOW TO TUBE FEED:

1. **Select syringes:** Select an appropriate size syringe for formula based on kitten's weight and the volume that is being fed. Select an additional syringe for water, usually 3mL (enough to prime the tube with water and then administer a small amount to the kitten).
2. **Select a tube:** Select a red rubber tube – options are 3.5Fr, 5Fr, or 8Fr – based on the kitten's size.
3. **Measure tube:** Measure from the blunt end of the tube lined up at the level of the last rib (where the stomach ends) up to the mouth/lips. Mark the tube with a permanent marker at the mouth level. Do not cut the tube, as this will remove the blunted soft end.



4. **Fill syringe with formula:** Prepare formula with 3-4 parts water to 1 part powder to help keep the tube from clogging. Draw up the appropriate amount of warmed formula into the larger syringe.
5. **Prime the tube with water:** Fill the smaller syringe with 3mL of water. Connect the syringe of water to the tube and push water into the tube until a drop comes out the end.
6. **Lubricate the tube:** Apply a small amount of lubricant jelly to the end of the tube.
7. **Wrap the kitten:** Burrito the kitten, ensure that forelimbs are secure. If the kitten has teeth, wrap the lower jaw to prevent the kitten from biting the tube (if the kitten is able to bite through the tube, a severed piece can go down into the stomach – the kitten will need surgery or endoscopy to remove!).



8. **Insert the tube and advance:** While maintaining the kitten in a burrito, insert the tube toward the back of the mouth on the kitten's left side. It should insert easily and without resistance. Advance until the mark is reached. To prevent the tube from slipping out, it is helpful to hold the red rubber tube just past the kitten's mouth to keep it stable.
9. **Check placement:** The water syringe should be attached to the tube and the tube primed; advance a small amount of water. If the kitten coughs, the tube is not placed correctly and should be removed, then start over. If no cough is noted, the tube is placed correctly.
10. **Change the syringe:** Switch to the syringe of warmed formula, keeping the tube stable. (Having an assistant can be helpful for less experienced tube feeders.)
11. **Check placement:** Ensure that the mark is still at the kitten's mouth and that the tube did not come out.
12. **Feed:** Slowly push the formula.
13. **Remove tube:** Rapidly remove the tube, still connected to the syringe.
14. **Rinse tube:** Rinse the tube and formula syringe several times with water by pulling up water through the tube (to prepare for the next feeding, so that no formula residue is left in the tube).