

What Is Failure to Thrive (FTT)?

The first four weeks of life can be the most perilous time for young kittens. Kittens face so many dangers. Because they lack mature immune systems, kittens face the constant threat of diseases, and a sick kitten can have a difficult time reaching the milestone of adulthood.

A lot of animals never make it to adulthood and never enter the breeding population. They fall prey to predators, they starve or dehydrate, they do not find sufficient shelter, and they are infected by diseases or injured. Because most of these issues are not prevalent in the care of foster families, the unsuccessful kittens are generally grouped under the term "**failure to thrive.**"

The first step that most fosters do is usually look for causes, things we can control and manipulate. Sometimes, no matter your best efforts, there are kittens that just do not thrive and often these "faders" will just lose strength. They are the rare animal that does not do as well as others no matter how well we provide for its needs.

Things to watch for in FTT:

- Normal puppy and kitten neonates sleep and nurse. They spend most of their time in a group and cry only briefly. Neonates that lie away from the group, cry constantly, are restless, or fail to nurse are signs of Failure to Thrive.
- Mouth breathing is NEVER normal for a kitten or cat. Kittens should always breathe through their nose with their mouth closed.
- Although the first 4 weeks of life are the most fragile, Failure to Thrive can still happen in kittens up to 9 weeks in age.
- A pinch test is a good indicator of dehydration: *Tent the skin between the shoulder blades, if the skin bounces back quickly it is well hydrated. If you notice that the skin is slow to bounce back, the kitten is likely dehydrated and can deteriorate quickly.*
- Severe lethargy and no appetite, coupled with vomiting and diarrhea and signs that your kitten may be experiencing FTT.

Is it an emergency?

If you feel that your kitten is going through FTT and it is after hours at the Shelter, please wait until morning and then bring the kitten in to see a Vet. Keep the kitten dry, warm, and comfortable, and DO NOT force feed it. It is important not to panic as a foster parent and to understand that FTT can be common. Often there is little that can be done in true cases of FTT, therefore taking the kitten to an Emergency clinic will only result in a huge expense on your part.

What if my kitten dies at night?

If your kitten experiences FTT and passes away during the night, gently place the kitten in a plastic bag and put it in your freezer. You can either bring the kitten into the Shelter the next morning or call for additional options.

****It is important to understand that when a kitten suffers from FTT, it is NOT the fault of anyone involved. Sometimes, there is little that can be done to stop "fading kitten/puppy syndrome". No matter how much tender loving care kittens are given, some just don't survive. Unfortunately, it's the natural cycle of life.***