

Parker Protocol for Fading Kitten Syndrome

Fading Kitten Syndrome is a common experience for foster parents but with little information on how to treat it. It is considered a syndrome because there are multiple causes and a constellation of symptoms however it is almost always marked by lethargy, limpness, weak crying, not wanting to eat, and dehydration. While the Parker Protocol cannot save a kitten who is severely ill, injured, or malformed, it has an excellent success rate for malnutrition, hypoglycemia, hypothermia, or dehydration from diarrhea or vomiting.

Death due to FKS is precipitated by a crash; the kitten may lose consciousness, be unable to suckle, and will not produce urine because they are dehydrated. The key to surviving FKS is to AVOID THE CRASH! As soon as symptoms are noticed, it's important to treat them. A moderately lethargic kitten will recover faster than an unconscious one. Taking an approach of "wait and see" when dealing with diarrhea and vomiting rarely ends well. Contrary to popular opinion, IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO HAVE A DIAGNOSIS BEFORE TREATING DIARRHEA or any fading kitten symptoms. Diarrhea is its own diagnosis, no matter what the root cause may be. Consider that people do not rush to the emergency room at the first bout of loose stool. Instead, they reach for pepto bismol or immodium, and only go to the doctor if it still hasn't resolved in a few days. It is the same with companion animals. If the crash occurs, being prepared can make a difference between a good or poor outcome.

It's important to note that you should never feed a cold kitten. If your kitten is cold, wait until their ear tips are warm (minimum body temp of 94 degrees) before attempting to nurse or give oral fluids. Meanwhile, you can give them a few drops of straight corn syrup on their gums. Because that doesn't go through the gut, it's safer at lower body temperatures. Warm subcutaneous fluids are also appropriate. Subcutaneous fluids and corn syrup should always be your **FIRST** resort, not your last.

If infection is suspected (bacterial or parasitic) and antibiotics or antiparasitics are an option, it's best to begin the medication before starting protocol if possible. However in an emergency, do not wait. Begin the protocol immediately.

Things you'll need:

1ml, 5ml, 10ml syringe

24 or 25 gauge needle

electrolyte powder (I use Mommy's Bliss) or unflavored pedialyte formula made with electrolyte solution instead of water

unflavored karo syrup

lactated ringers solution

timer

scale

heating pad and towels (alternatively, you can use towels warmed on low in the dryer or a tube sock that is filled with rice and microwaved for 30 to 45 seconds then wrapped in a towel)

Step 1: Give an initial squirt of straight karo syrup at 0.1 ml per half pound (8oz) kitten weight then mix 3 tablespoons of syrup in ½ cup electrolyte solution. You will use this later.

Step 2: Whether a kitten seems dehydrated or not, they will benefit from subcutaneous fluids. If it is available, give 10ml of lactated ringers solution per pound every four to six hours. I usually start with 5ml in the scruff of the neck and wait to see how long it takes to be absorbed. If it is absorbed quickly, give another 5ml at the two hour mark. Warm the fluids before administration just as you would formula before nursing.

Step 3: Hypothermia happens quickly and neonates under three weeks old cannot warm themselves. Wrap them securely in a folded towel (a purrito) then wrap a heating pad set on low around the outside (like a taco). Make sure the only thing visible is their face. They lose heat from their ears so make sure they are covered. Do not unwrap them until they are conscious and fighting the towel. You can then loosen the purrito but still keep them covered. You should have several layers of toweling between the kitten and the heating pad in order to avoid burns.

Step 4: Using the electrolyte and karo syrup solution from step 1, give them 0.1 ml per ½ pound of kitten weight orally EVERY THREE MINUTES. The timing is essential. Do this until the kitten is conscious or no longer limp. This can take two to four hours. (I've done this for 36 hours until the kitten regained consciousness, so don't give up!!!) Holding the kitten in an upright position with the belly down, align the mouth at a 45 degree angle with the neck. Insert the syringe tip into the side of the mouth and slowly drip the fluid. This will decrease risk of aspiration (fluid going into lungs rather than down the esophagus).

Starting dose	.1 ml per ½ pound of kitten weight	Three minute interval until conscious
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Step 5: Make ½ cup formula using electrolyte solution instead of plain water. Begin alternating formula with the syrup solution (syrup solution, three minutes later give formula, three minutes later give syrup solution, etc.) and slowly increase both dose and time interval.

Alert kitten	.2 ml per ½ pound of kitten weight	Four minute interval
16 minutes later	.3 ml per ½ pound of kitten weight	Five minute interval
15 minutes later	.4 ml per ½ pound of kitten weight	Six minute interval
18 minutes later	.5 ml per ½ pound of kitten weight	Seven minute interval

Step 6: Mix 1.5 tablespoons karo syrup with ½ cup formula made with electrolyte solution. Continue increasing the dose and time interval but use the formula and syrup mixture rather than alternating them.

21 minutes later	.5 ml per ½ pound of kitten weight	Eight minute interval
24 minutes later	.5 ml per ½ pound of kitten weight	Nine minute interval
27 minutes later	.5 ml per ½ pound of kitten weight	10 minute interval
30 minutes later	.75 ml per ½ pound of kitten weight	15 minute interval
45 minutes later	1 ml per ½ pound of kitten weight	20 minute interval
1 hour later	1 ml per ½ pound of kitten weight	24 minute interval

Step 7: Once the kitten is taking 1 ml per ½ pound every 24 minutes, continue until kitten is “back to normal.” You can then return to their normal feeding schedule but continue mixing the formula with electrolyte solution rather than water for the first day, particularly if your kitten has diarrhea.

FKS is often a mystery and outcome cannot be guaranteed but I firmly believe that if a kitten is dying, the benefit outweighs the risk of doing nothing. A positive outcome is more likely if you act when symptoms first appear rather than waiting for a diagnosis. FKS is a syndrome so not every kitten will have every symptom.