Baby Squirrel Care

Step 1. Find a container, bedding, and a heating pad

Use the exact setup pictured below. Do not change anything! If you use a cardboard box it will dehydrate the baby. Towels or terrycloth bedding will catch his nails and strangle him. He will chill and die without a heating pad. If you place the heating pad under the whole container, or inside the container, it will cook him. Heat lamps will dehydrate him. Reptile warmers don't get warm enough.

In a pinch, you can make a “Rice Buddy.” Fill a sock with 1 cup of dry uncooked rice or beans and microwave for 30 seconds. Squish the sock to ensure there are no “hot spots.” Place next to baby and cover him. Reheat every 2 hours. NOTE: This won't keep the baby warm all night; You must use a heating pad without auto-shutoff.

Place baby on the bedding and cover him with one flap. Once the baby is warm, you can move to the next step.

THE PERFECT SETUP:
Step 2. Rehydrate the Baby

Most babies are dehydrated when you find them and must be rehydrated before feeding them.

How to Check for Dehydration: Pinch the skin on the back of his neck. If it doesn’t spring back immediately, the baby is dehydrated. If the pinched skin stays up like a tent for more than a second, the baby is badly dehydrated. Other signs of dehydration: lack of appetite, lethargy, pale gums, spiky fur, dry skin, looks thin and wrinkly.

Homemade Rehydration Fluid:
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 1/2 tablespoons sugar
2 cups warm water
Store in refrigerator. Discard after 24 hours.

Syringes: Use a plastic 1-3 cc (1-3 ml) syringe, with or without a nipple. An eyedropper works in a pinch. Never use pet nursers, doll bottles, cheap syringes, or syringes larger than 3 cc.

Heat the Fluid or Formula: Fill a coffee mug with hot water. Fill the syringe with the fluid and place it in the mug for a couple of minutes. Squirt a drop on the inside of your wrist. It should feel very warm but not hot on your skin.

Proper Position: Hold the baby upright in your hand. A baby that can walk can also drink sitting up or lying on his stomach. Don’t let the baby get cold. Keep him wrapped up while he eats.

Feeding Technique: Place the syringe tip on the baby’s lips (from the side) and squeeze out one drop for him to taste. Don’t squirt a steady stream. Let him swallow one drop before squeezing more. GO SLOW! It sometimes takes a feeding or two for them to catch on. Hairless babies are fed drop by drop. With older babies (once they catch on) you can squeeze slowly for one second, wait for him to swallow, then squeeze again.

If fluids dribble out his mouth or nose, you’re going too fast. Stop and tilt the baby’s head down so the fluid drains out (support his head and neck). Then wipe his nose and mouth with a tissue. Start over, slower. The baby is now at risk for aspiration pneumonia, which is fatal. Contact a rehabber, vet, or The Squirrel Board for assistance.

Never feed “Pedialyte” for more than 24 hours (too much sodium). Use Homemade Rehydration Fluid (without the salt) instead.

Never mix rehydration fluids with formula. Give fluids separately, in between formula feedings.

#1 Feeding Rule: GO SLOW!

Hold the syringe so the tip points UP to the mouth and the syringe handle points DOWN.

Never feed formula or food to a dehydrated baby!
PROPER FEEDING TECHNIQUE:

In all these examples, the syringe is pointing UP to the baby’s mouth.

Babies less than 4 weeks old should be wrapped in fleece while feeding so they don’t get chilled.
Step 3. Formula Feeding

If you don’t have the correct formula on hand, you have two choices for a temporary formula:

1) Homemade Goat Milk Formula: 3 parts goat milk, 1 part plain yogurt, 1 part heavy cream. Leave out the cream for the first few feedings and then add it in gradually. If diarrhea occurs, reduce or eliminate the cream for a few feedings.

2) Esbilac puppy milk (powder not liquid). MUST say “with probiotics and prebiotics” on the label. Dilute 3 parts water to 1 part powder for the first few feedings and then slowly increase the powder until you’re mixing it full strength according to label directions.

If a baby less than 4 weeks old does well on either of these temporary formulas, you may continue to use it until the baby is 4 weeks old. Then switch to Fox Valley 20/50. This minimizes formula changes, which can cause digestive upset.

**Babies younger than 4 weeks can have problems tolerating any formula.** If the formula you are using is causing diarrhea, bloat, or severe constipation that is not due to overfeeding, wrong formula, or dehydration (which can cause constipation), immediately switch to one of the other choices for babies less than 4 weeks: Homemade Goat Milk Formula, Esbilac Puppy Formula with Probiotics, or Fox Valley 32/40. Once the baby is older than 4 weeks, you should switch to Fox Valley 20/50, as it is generally tolerated extremely well and provides optimal nutrition.

### Feeding Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age in Weeks</th>
<th>Amount to Feed*</th>
<th>How Often</th>
<th>Night Feeding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt;1</td>
<td>0.75-1 cc</td>
<td>Every 2 hours</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-2 cc</td>
<td>Every 3 hours</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2-3 cc</td>
<td>Every 3-4 hours</td>
<td>If needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4-5.5 cc</td>
<td>Every 3-4 hours</td>
<td>If needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6-9 cc</td>
<td>Every 4 hours</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10-12 cc</td>
<td>Every 4 hours</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>12-14 cc</td>
<td>Every 5 hours</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These are estimates. Amount fed should be based on weight of baby. See 5%-7% Feeding Rule below.

**5-7% Feeding Rule**

You can figure the amount to feed using the 5-7% feeding rule. Weigh the baby on a gram scale; multiply that number by 5%; and that will be the number of cc’s (or ml’s) to feed per feeding.

**EXAMPLE:** Squirrel weighs 50 grams

\[
50 \times 5\% = 2.5 \quad \text{(Using a calculator, it’s } 50 \times 0.05 = 2.5) \]

So, you feed 2.5 cc’s per feeding

You can go up to 7% (weight in grams x .07) for most babies after a few feedings. No not overfeed! Babies will overeat if you let them and get diarrhea, which can be fatal. Weigh the baby every day at the same time to determine if they are gaining or losing weight.

Feeding amounts and schedule may need to be adjusted to fit the squirrel. An emaciated baby may need to be fed smaller amounts more often.
Potty Time

Babies less than 5 weeks old will need to be stimulated to poop and pee. Use a warm, wet cotton ball, Q-tip, the corner of a Kleenex, or your finger, and flick lightly across the genital area. You are simulating the mother squirrel’s tongue. Some babies may need stimulation before and after feeding. A few may eat better if you potty them in the middle of a feeding.

Step 4. Weaning

At approximately 6-7 weeks old, you can introduce solid foods. The first solid food should be rodent block or squirrel block. The baby may not show much interest at first; keep putting in a fresh block each day until he begins nibbling. You may want to cut the block into smaller pieces.

Once the baby is able to chew well, you can introduce vegetables from the Healthy Diet for Pet Squirrels. Introduce new foods one at a time in case it causes diarrhea. This is because the squirrel’s digestive system isn’t mature enough. Try the food again in a week or two. You may also introduce small sticks or branches for him to gnaw. Add a water bottle to the cage as well.

Be careful to remove any seeds, pits, skin, or strings, as these can cause choking in a baby squirrel.

During the transition to solid foods do not give nuts, fruit, or treats of any kind. Concentrate on formula, blocks, healthy veggies, and wild foods. It’s important they learn to love these healthy foods. Once the squirrel is eating her healthy foods well, you can add limited nuts/fruits/treats according to the Healthy Diet for Pet Squirrels.

All during this process, continue to offer formula until the squirrel weans himself at around 14-16 weeks of age. Never wean a baby squirrel off formula; let them wean themselves.

Common Problems

Bloating

Bloating can occur when a squirrel eats too much and/or too often. The stomach should be rounded after feeding, but still soft, like a half-filled water balloon. It should deflate before the next feeding. If stomach feels hard or does not deflate before next feeding, skip a feeding, hydrate, and decrease the amount of formula at each feeding or increase the amount of time between feedings. Stimulate to potty. A warm water bath and gentle massage can also help. Below are examples of bloat:
Clicking (aspiration pneumonia)
If formula comes out baby’s nose, formula may get into the lungs, causing aspiration pneumonia. Symptoms are loss of appetite, lethargy, and a clicking noise when the baby breathes. Hold the baby to your ear like a phone, and listen carefully. The clicking is with each breath, in and out. This must be treated immediately with antibiotics or the baby will die. Consult a rehabber, vet, or The Squirrel Board.

Diarrhea
This can be caused by overfeeding, too frequent feeding, wrong formula, or parasites. Stop feeding formula for a couple of feedings and hydrate instead. If baby is less than 4 weeks old, you may need to switch to the Homemade Goat Milk Formula. Diarrhea can kill quickly so consult a rehabber, vet, or The Squirrel Board.

Constipation
It can take a day or so for the baby to start pooping after starting formula. If constipation persists, try adding a little apple juice to the formula for a few feedings. Constipation can also mean the baby is still dehydrated, so you can also try giving warm water in a syringe between feedings.

Hypoglycemia
Caused by spacing the feedings too far apart. Baby may arch his back, have spasms, and gasp for breath. Rub molasses, honey, or pancake syrup on its gums. You should see improvement within 30 minutes. Try feeding smaller amounts more frequently.

Feeding Trance
While feeding, some babies will stop swallowing and open and close their mouth like a fish. This is not harmful but means feeding takes longer. A small tap on the head can help. When they stop gulping, you can resume feeding them.

Nursing on Genitals
Baby squirrels may nurse on the males’ genitals when they are housed together. You may have to separate the squirrels until they are a little older. This can cause permanent damage to the penis and must be stopped quickly and treated.

Refuses to Feed/Blood on Nipple
Babies teethe twice, once for upper teeth and once for lowers. Teething may cause the baby to suddenly refuse to eat, or eat less than normal, and you may see a little blood. This is normal and should pass after 24 hours.

#1 Killers of Baby Squirrels

Lack of a proper heating pad => baby becomes chilled
Wrong formula (KMR, Hartz, human baby formula, “scalded milk”) => diarrhea, bloating
Cheap syringes that stick => aspiration pneumonia
Syringes bigger than 3 cc (hard to control) => aspiration pneumonia
Feeding too fast => aspiration pneumonia
Overfeeding => diarrhea, bloating
Is Your Baby Healthy?

Newborn: Pink, hairless, no eye slits visible, ears sealed flat to the head

1-2 weeks: Dark color on head and back, eye slits visible, ears coming away from head

3 weeks: Short fur everywhere except on belly
4 weeks: Thicker fur, eyes almost ready to open, lower teeth emerging

Healthy

Not Healthy

5 weeks: Fully furred including belly, eyes open, upper teeth emerging

Healthy

Plump and rounded, fur is sleek and shiny

Not healthy

Skinny, feels light and bony, head too big for body, fur rough and spiky