

# Feeding Baby/Young Squirrels

**YOU MUST** read and follow these instructions very carefully. They have been developed over several years of intensive experience with young squirrels. If you are worried, or just not sure, do not hesitate to contact us. Always better to be safe than sorry.

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### 1 - Do not feed a cold squirrel

It is vital not to feed a young squirrel until it is warm to the touch. If necessary, see **12. Dehydration** below.

### 2 - Once warm, feed immediately

Assuming that your baby squirrel is warm and not dehydrated, it will need feeding as soon as possible. Basically, the younger the squirrel, the less time it can survive without milk. Tiny babies less than 2 weeks old (pinkies) are especially vulnerable.

### 3 - What to feed?

The baby will need feeding with **substitute milk** (see recipe at end of this section) regularly throughout the day.

### 4 - How?

Using a **pipette**, or a **syringe** with the needle removed. Allow the baby to determine the speed of the feeding.

Initially, the baby may take a few minutes to get used to feeding this way. Gently offer a drop by perhaps lifting the baby's lip and putting a drop in the mouth. Be careful to allow baby to swallow at its own speed, as it is easy to feed too quickly and milk can enter the lungs, which can prove fatal.

### 5 - How often?

Babies up to 5 weeks:	every <b>2 hours</b> from <b>dawn</b> to <b>dusk</b> (not overnight, unless you are worried)
5-7 weeks :	every <b>2.5-3</b> hours
7-10 weeks:	every <b>3-4</b> hours
10+ weeks :	three times a day, reducing gradually to none

Feed regularly as the baby will expect food. Unexpected long periods without food can cause stress, which is dangerous for the baby squirrel.

### 6 - How much?

Up to 5 weeks	5-7 mls per feed
5-6 weeks	7-10 mls
7-10 weeks	10-15 mls
10+ weeks	10 + mls

Obviously these amounts are only guides – your squirrel may be more or less hungry. And amounts they take at each meal may vary – often they feed better in the mornings and evenings. Ensure that over the whole day they average well within the above amounts.

Feed slowly, let the baby dictate how much. Patience and persistence is key. Some difficult feeders may take 15 mins, easy ones 2-3. Do not get impatient or give up – it is vital that the squirrel gets a decent amount at each feed. Do not force feed – getting milk in their lungs can be fatal. The baby will stop when he/she is full.

## **7 - Toileting**

### **Babies with eyes shut**

After each feeding you **must** toilet your baby.

Gather warm water, cotton wool or cotton buds and a pot to use as a bin. Gently stroke the genitals and anus of your baby. Use a different cotton bud for each wipe for reasons of hygiene, and stimulate until baby has relieved himself.

It can be helpful to perform toileting first if baby is reluctant to feed. Stroking down from above the genitals helps the bladder to relax, and the baby should pass a few drops. Wipe away all that is passed.

### **Young squirrels with eyes open**

When you first get your squirrel, toilet as above until you are confident and you have evidence that it is toileting itself.

## **8- Squirrel Poo**

Babies reliant on milk will have yellowy soft stools. As they move to solid food, their stools will become more firm, and darker brown in colour. They should always be soft in texture.

**IMPORTANT** - If your squirrel has small, dry, black stools, it is **dehydrated** – see below.

## **9 - Diarrhoea**

Diarrhoea is not uncommon amongst hand-fed squirrels, and is usually due to the change in diet.

**Do not panic. DO NOT UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES STOP FEEDING MILK.**

Although it can be alarming, if your squirrel is still lively, bright eyed and generally behaving normally, then it will probably not be a problem.

Be flexible: adjust the milk formula slightly until the tummy upset resolves itself. Reduce the yogurt, or increase the cows' milk – one change every 24 hours until things settle down.

Dehydration is the important thing to be aware of. If you think your squirrel is being dehydrated, try replacing one feed per day with Rehydration fluid (from Vet or see our recipe below).

If there is a change in behaviour, your squirrel becomes lethargic or agitated or loses its appetite – call us.

**DO NOT FEED SQUIRREL ANY ANTI-DIARRHOEA MEDICATION.**

**It can KILL.**

## **10 - Weaning**

Any squirrel under 8 weeks of age will probably be totally reliant on milk. Generally, squirrels up to 12 weeks old will still appreciate some milk. Start on the weaning foods at about 7-8 weeks – if the squirrel is not ready, it will not eat them. If it is a particularly hungry squirrel, try baby rusk dipped in milk.

Between 8 and 12 weeks the juvenile squirrel will start to be weaned and need a variety of food in addition to the milk.

## **Drinking**

Once squirrels start eating solid food, they will need access to water **as well as milk** (do not stop the milk too soon). The water should be preferably filtered and have the chill taken off it. At first use a small pipette, and later attach a feeding bottle (such as you would use for a hamster) to the cage. Don't force it on the squirrel - be gentle and patient and the squirrel will usually get the idea!

## **Eating**

Good weaning foods - try your young squirrel on the following:

- pine nuts
- avocado

These are excellent weaning foods as they are soft and very nutritious. Some squirrels also enjoy baby rusk dipped in milk.

Once they are eating solids, we have found that they like (in order of importance):

- Small pieces of nuts (especially pine nuts which are quite soft) preferably mixed, with not too many peanuts. Obviously the nuts must not be in their shells and must be unsalted.
- Small pieces of fresh fruit, such as apple, grape and banana, as well as broccoli and carrot.
- Dried fruit such as raisins and sultanas.
- Special K especially with red berries!
- Small pieces of digestive biscuit.

Offer a small amount as there will be wastage. It is trial and error as what one squirrel will devour another will toilet on!

## **Nuts in Shells**

Juvenile squirrels will begin to appreciate nuts in their shells, but they may need you to partially **crack** them open until their teeth are stronger or before they get the hang of cracking shells.

Variety is certainly the spice of life as far as a squirrel's diet goes.

## **11 - Substitute Milk**

You will need:

- full fat goats' milk
- full fat cows' milk
- **live** natural plain yogurt
- Abidec toddler vitamin drops (or similar)

### **Method**

- Using two thirds goats' and one third cows', make up approx ¼ pint.

- Add one teaspoon of yogurt.

- Add 2-3 drops of Abidec.

- Stir well and store in fridge.

- At each feed, pour a few teaspoons of the mixture into a small bowl and **warm gently**. We do this by putting small bowl into larger bowl with warm water in. Feed squirrel and discard any leftover milk.

- Squirrels do not like cold milk!

To store, cover and put it in the fridge. Only keep a batch for 24 hours.

**Full fat milk** is essential as it contains all the nutrients the squirrel needs. **Semi skimmed** is temporarily acceptable but skimmed has no benefit to the squirrel. Remember you are trying to replace mother's milk.

**Vitamin drops** are advisable, and can be easily purchased from chemists.

The recipe above is tried and tested by us to a good degree of success, but nature has taught us to be flexible. Some people use powdered formula milk, which we don't approve of, with the possible exception of **Esbilac**, which is a reasonable substitute, although expensive.

## **12 - Dehydration**

Water is essential for digestion and if the body's reserves are depleted other body functions will suffer.

If the squirrels poo is small, black and dry, the squirrel is probably dehydrated.

Check that the squirrel's nose is moist, and if possible try to check that the mouth is wet.

If necessary, use the '**pinch test**'. Hold a fold of skin on the back of the neck so that it is raised. When released the skin should return to normal straight away. Try the test on the back of your hand, perhaps. If the skin doesn't retract immediately, it is probable that the squirrel is dehydrated.

Feed the squirrel rehydration formula. Either a small amount with each feed, or replace one feed per day with rehydration fluid. DO NOT give more than this as it can upset their digestion.

### **Rehydration Fluid**

Vets sell a powder called **Lectade** (or similar) which can be mixed with water and administered orally with a pipette.

Failing this, use the **International Rehydration Solution**:

- Half a litre of water (preferably filtered)
- Half a teaspoonful salt
- Half a tablespoonful sugar or glucose

Stir until salt and sugar are dissolved and administer lukewarm. If the dehydration lasts more than 12 hours (or if the squirrel refuses to drink) it would be wise to see a vet (see below) who may well administer a rehydrating solution subcutaneously.

### **13 – Fleas**

If there are any fleas on your squirrel, we suggest you use a mild anti-flea spray suitable for kittens/puppies and then wash the squirrel in lukewarm water a couple of minutes later (don't get the head wet) to get rid of most of the fleas. This should help. Change the bedding soon afterwards too as the last fleas will probably be found in the bedding. Maybe repeat the process next day if there are any left.

### **14 – Vets and Squirrels**

If you have any concerns about the well-being of your squirrel, make an urgent appointment with a vet. Be warned: many are indifferent or intolerant towards grey squirrels (and often wildlife in general). However, vets are obliged under the Guide to Professional Conduct Edition 2002 to treat any animal in distress. If necessary, remind your vet of this!

One of the main reservations vets have about admitting squirrels is that they don't want to be left with the creature. Some rather archaic laws concerning grey squirrels in the UK still make it an offence to release one back into the wild without a licence. Therefore make a big point when you make your appointment **and** when you see the vet, to assure them that you will be taking the squirrel away to pass on to an experienced carer/sanctuary. Otherwise there is a likelihood that the squirrel will be euthanised, regardless of its health.

Do not let a vet euthanise a squirrel unless you are sure that its chances of recovery are very slim. We have experience of some vets taking this option to save themselves work or expense.

### ***What About Payment?***

Whilst a vet cannot force you to pay for treatment to a wild animal, we advise that you offer some payment. Our own vet charges for drugs, but not for his time. Basically, explain that you are willing to make a contribution and be prepared to compromise.

We appreciate feedback about vets, especially if you have found one who is really sympathetic to squirrels, as we are trying to build up a national network of carers and vets.

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