

Detailed Information about Baby Squirrel Care

These instructions absolutely are not meant for the purpose of raising pet squirrels.

Squirrels are not domesticated and do not make good pets. Always wear gloves when handling wild babies. They can carry diseases and parasites and are also able to bite at a young age. (If the animal is an injured adult, it may be safest for you to cover it with a laundry basket or box to protect it, but leave it where you found it, and then locate a rehabilitator or animal control operator to pick the animal up.)



What to do first:

Try to reunite the baby or babies with their mom. If you think the mother squirrel may still be in the area and you have a good idea where the nest is that the babies came from, you can give the mother the opportunity to retrieve the babies.

If a baby is sick, injured or cold the chances are that the mom will not come back to retrieve it.

Fly eggs look like small yellow dots or flakes on the babies, and if left alone will develop into maggots. Babies with any fly eggs or maggots should not be left for their mom. They must be taken in and all the eggs removed immediately.

If the babies are warm and healthy and there is a good chance that the mother may still be in the area, we recommend giving her about 2 hours to come back for the babies. If she has not come for them within the 2-hour time frame, then she probably won't come for them.

Place the babies in a box. You can place this box near the tree or area they came from. Make sure that the babies can't get out of the box but the mother will be able to get in and get the babies. If the babies still have their eyes closed, they will need a heat source to help them keep warm. Even on hot summer days baby squirrels can get chilled quickly. A soda bottle filled with hot water and covered with a sock can be placed near the babies. Test to be sure the temperature isn't too hot, and place a tee-shirt around it to be sure it doesn't roll onto the babies.

Supervise the reunion attempt carefully but from a distance. Make sure the babies are safe from natural predators such as cats, dogs, hawks, crows, and snakes. But you must also remain out of mom's sight, so that she feels safe coming for the babies.

If the babies are found just before dark, **DO NOT** place them out for mom. She won't be moving after dark. You can put them out in place as soon as the sun is up in the morning. If she is in the area she will start looking for them then.

If reuniting doesn't work, then it's time to read on!.

Wearing your gloves, put the baby or babies in a box that has soft cloths such as old tee shirts in the bottom for snuggling in. This box should be placed in a dark, warm and very quiet area indoors away from children and pets. The cloths will have to be changed often as they get soiled. Make sure the cloths that you use do not have loose strings or loops that the animal's fingers, legs, or teeth could get caught up on. Terrycloth is not recommended for use.

The baby should feel warm to the touch. If it feels cold, place a **heating pad under half of the box.** Set it on

low. If you do not have a heating pad, you can use a hot water bottle wrapped in a tee shirt. You can make one by filling an empty soda bottle with hot water. Make sure it doesn't leak, then put it in a sock and put it in the box next to the babies. Arrange a tee shirt or other soft cloth near it to be sure it doesn't roll onto the babies. Whatever heat source you use, keep checking the temperature to make sure the babies are kept warm and comfortable.

While you are warming the baby you can examine him for any injuries. Any **bone breaks** will have to be treated by a veterinarian. Open wounds must be washed thoroughly and dressed with an **antibiotic cream**.

Listed below are **common health problems** you may come across. If you do encounter any of the listed circumstances below they will need to be taken care of right away. If possible, get the animal to a veterinarian or an experienced wildlife rehabilitator immediately. In case you cannot get the assistance you need, I have listed ways to help the animal.



Dehydration:

This is very common when animals first arrive.

To test for dehydration, lightly pinch the skin over the shoulders.

If it stays tented for a couple of seconds then the animal is dehydrated and fluids must be replenished. It is always best to assume that any orphan baby is dehydrated to some degree.

Pedialyte is the best hydrating solution to use. It can be found in pharmacies and grocery stores in the baby aisle. Before feeding the animal anything else, feed it a few meals of Pedialyte. Don't be in a hurry to feed other foods. An animal that is dehydrated can't digest foods well and may become very sick or even die if food is given too soon.

Maggots: It is not rare for orphaned summer babies to have maggots or the eggs from maggots on them. It is critical that any maggots or eggs be removed immediately. This is not something that can wait! Check the ears, eyes, nose, mouth, rectum, or any injuries that the maggots could be inside of. Normally I bathe the animal in warm water diluted with Dawn dish detergent and this will help loosen the eggs. The maggots look like small worms and will need to be removed with pointed tweezers. If there are any maggots in the ears, nose, throat, or rectum, remove any that you can, and then take the animal to a veterinarian immediately to have the rest removed.

Hypoglycemic Seizure: If your baby is arching his head back and acting very weak then he may be hypoglycemic due to **lack of glucose in his system**. You can give him a small amount honey, karo syrup, or all-fruit jelly on his tongue to help pull him out of a **Hypoglycemic seizure**.

Emaciation: This is very common with animals that have been orphaned for a full day or two. The animal will be very thin and weak. Hydrate the animal with Pedialyte every fifteen minutes for the first hour. Transition slowly to Ensure (human supplement found in food stores and pharmacies) which is very easy for the baby to digest, and then gradually introduce Esbilac Puppy milk replacer. Don't rush the process. An emaciated animal should be in the hands of a veterinarian or very experienced wildlife rehabilitator as soon as possible.

Cat Caught: Clean the wounds thoroughly with an antiseptic wash and rinse thoroughly. You must look very carefully for puncture wounds through the fur. Sometimes cat punctures can almost be impossible to see. Any animal that has been in a cat's mouth will need antibiotics **AS SOON AS POSSIBLE** to prevent infection from the cat bite, even if you don't see any wounds. If the animal does have any punctures and is not treated with antibiotics then the chances of survival are very slim.

Head Trauma: This is usually caused by falling out of a tree. The baby should be seen by a veterinarian for this but

in the meantime you should warm it and start on Pedialyte and rinse, rinse, rinse.

Very Cold Baby: Babies under 5 weeks old will become chilled without the warmth of the mother's body heat even in very warm temperatures. A baby will not start maintaining its own body temperature until about 5 weeks of age, shortly after its eyes open. You must gradually warm this baby. Holding the baby in warm water, NOT HOT, will help to warm the baby, you should also massage the body of the animal to promote blood circulation.

Fleas: These are not the same types of fleas that you'll find on your dog or cat. You can use most kitten flea powders safely with squirrels. Advantage Top Spot is also safe for squirrels. I do not recommend using Frontline on squirrels as there has not been evidence yet that Frontline is safe for them. With a light flea load, if using a powder, put the animal in a container with flea powder in the bottom and then place a paper towel on top of the flea powder and place the animal on the paper towel. If the animal is heavily infested with fleas, pick off and destroy all that you can, and then carefully wipe the powder with a tissue onto the skin of the squirrel. Start at the nose and work back toward the tail.

Pneumonia: This is not usually seen upon arrival but can occur after an inexperienced person has fed an animal and repeatedly aspirated the animal. Aspiration happens when the squirrel drinks too fast and the fluid goes up into its nose, and sometimes into the lungs. If it gets into the lungs, then pneumonia can result.



If a baby does aspirate the liquid, you will see it bubble out of his nose.

To prevent this from causing pneumonia, immediately tip the baby forward so that his head is down.

Hold him securely and allow the fluid to drain out of the nose. There is no need to pat the back, as there is nothing to dislodge. Let gravity remove the fluids.

When the baby is calm again and the nose is clear, resume the feeding.

Sometimes pneumonia will happen in spite of your efforts. Symptoms of pneumonia can be a clicking sound in the throat area, open mouth breathing, or a runny or congested nose. If these symptoms are present, take the animal to a veterinarian or an experienced wildlife rehabilitator immediately.

Bloat: This is not normally seen on arrival but may occur if an animal has been fed an improper formula or overfed. Be sure to follow the feeding instructions closely and the improper formula will not be an issue. If the baby does bloat, don't feed or offer water until its resolved. You can offer a few drops of human baby gas drops (simethicone) to ease the gas. You can also soak the baby's lower half in a warm water bath while you massage his tummy. Do this for 5 minutes or so, then dry the baby and let him rest in a warm spot for 15 minutes and try again. Your goal is to get the baby to pass stool, gas or urine, and relieve the bloat.

Now, back to taking care of that baby!

Once the body temperature is warm the baby will need to be re-hydrated. An animal will get **dehydrated** very quickly once away from the mother. If the skin tents when gently pinched, and the animal seems listless and weak, it is dehydrated.

As mentioned above, it is always best to assume a baby is dehydrated to some degree and will need to be re-hydrated. The best hydrating solution to use is **Unflavored Pedialyte**. It can be purchased at most grocery stores and pharmacies in the baby aisle. If you can't find Pedialyte, you can use the generic for Pedialyte, but please make sure it is actually a generic for Pedialyte. If there is no other option, you can make your own by combining **1 teaspoon salt with 3 tablespoons sugar in 1 quart of warm water**. It is extremely important to warm the babies first, then re-hydrate them before starting them on any formula. When giving any liquid the temperature of the

liquid should be luke warm, never hot and never cold.

The best way to administer the fluid is with a small **syringe: preferably a 1cc and no larger than a 3cc syringe**. You should be able to purchase an oral syringe in a pharmacy in the pediatric section or possibly your pharmacist will give you a syringe without a needle on it.

The larger the syringe the higher the chance of aspirating the animal. (See aspiration pneumonia above).



If a baby aspirates the liquid, you will see it bubble out of his nose. We do not recommend using an eyedropper or baby bottle because they both allow the animal to aspirate the fluid very easily.

If you have no choice but to use a dropper, try to not let the squirrel suck on the tip of the dropper but rather drip the fluid onto his tongue or lips and allow him to lap instead of sucking. It is natural for these animals to have a sucking reflex and the flow can be too large coming from a dropper. Use extreme caution.

If the baby is in very poor condition, it may need to be force fed very gradually. This is very crucial and necessary information and is a must for a proper start. Hold the baby in an **upright position for feeding and rehydrating, never on its back.**

You may use the hydrating solution for up to 12 hours if necessary giving the baby the solution every 2 hours. If you know there is no chance that you can get the baby to a rehabilitator in the near future, then after the baby is warm and re-hydrated, you may start it on formula. When feeding the baby watch his stomach size. . You do not want to over feed. The primary cause of diarrhea in wild babies is overfeeding. The belly should be round but not tight when he has had enough.

Make sure the baby is awake. You can wake him by wiping his face and belly with a warm damp cloth. To the baby, this will feel a little as if its mother was licking it.

The formula may be fed the same way as the hydrating solution, with a syringe and very gradually. The best formula to use is **Esbilac or Milk Matrix 33/40 by PetAg. Esbilac** can be purchased at most pet shops or here at The Squirrel Store, BUT, we prefer you purchase the Esbilac immediately at a local pet store. The squirrels do not have time to wait for delivery from Connecticut. **DO NOT** allow the pet store employees to talk you into a different formula to be used as a substitute. Remember, most pet stores specialize in domestic animals, and their employees usually have no knowledge about care of wildlife.

Esbilac comes premixed, or in powder form. If you purchase the powder form, you will mix it more dilute to begin with. This will be easier on the babies' digestive system. Use one part powder and four parts of water, and mix what you will use at one feeding. Mix in all the lumps, and use a strainer if you need to. For each of the next feedings make the formula more concentrated by adding less water until you are mixing the formula at 1 part formula powder to 2 parts water.

If you have bought liquid Esbilac than you should still add an equal part of water for the first feeding and then less at each subsequent feeding, until you are feeding it full strength. The formula should be luke-warm, but never hot.

Never feed the babies any kind of cow's milk or soymilk.

These milks are quick killers for wildlife. **Please DON'T use homemade formulas that can be found on the Internet.** These are totally inappropriate for squirrels and the long-term effects can be deadly for them. These homemade formulas are stated as being the best when in reality they are the worst. Please do not follow them.

Remember, do not overfeed the animal, the belly should be full and round but not tight. A good guideline to use is

the animal should be getting 5% formula to his body weight. If you have a small scale that can measure grams you can figure the feedings that way. A squirrel weighing 100 grams would get 5% of his body weight at a feeding, or 5 ml of formula. But remember, that is only a guideline, every animal is different.

Do not go by age but rather the size and condition of the animal. **Formula should be fed every two or three hours** depending on the age of the animal. (Example: A 5-week-old squirrel will be strictly on formula and not yet on solid foods, so he will need to be fed every three hours. A seven-week-old squirrel will be nibbling on solid foods, and will need formula about four times a day, or every 4 hours.

Young squirrel babies who still have their eyes closed or who have just opened their eyes will need to be **stimulated to urinate and have a bowel movement**. You stimulate the baby by wiping his abdomen and genital area with a warm damp cloth. The baby should have a bowel movement and urinate, but if he has not had food for quite sometime you may not see a bowel movement immediately.

It is important to check the size of the stomach before you feed him another feeding. If the stomach size is not smaller by the time the baby is due for another feeding then the animal has **not been able to digest his meal from the last feeding. Don't feed him yet.**

Stimulate to see if he will have a bowel movement, or urinate. If not, he may have gas, or bloat or may be constipated. If you think this may be the case, then you can soak the lower half of his body in warm water and massage his back, sides and abdomen. He will need to pass gas or some stool to relieve the problem. Don't allow him to become chilled while you work with him.



Weaning Diet: At about 6 weeks old your squirrel will be ready to start nibbling on solid food. These foods may include kale, broccoli, apples, grapes, sweet potato, and hard-shelled nuts out of the shell and a good quality rodent diet. (**Mazuri Rodent Block or Zupreme Primate Dry Diet.**)

Your squirrel will still be consuming formula till about 9-10 weeks of age. Once the squirrel is consuming a good amount of solid foods than you can start cutting out a feeding every few days. Make sure he is eating well and still gaining weight before reducing the number of feedings again.

To help you determine the age of your squirrel you can go back to the squirrel information page and click the link for determining the age of squirrels. This link will show you photos of squirrels at various ages.

Please remember: This information is only to help you until you are able to reach a Licensed Wildlife rehabilitator. I do not advise that any one keep wild animals as pets, and/or to try to raise and release them themselves, which is illegal in most States anyways..

The release is a very crucial time and needs to be done by someone with experience in wildlife rehabilitation and who has proper caging. If a squirrel is just "let go," chances are it will not survive.

Please do all you can to contact a wildlife expert. If you live in the State of TX, you can contact me as your local rehabilitator, and I will be happy to take the animal from you or direct you to someone nearby.

PLEASE NOTE: Much of this information can be used on other mammals, except for the actual formula can be different depending on the specie. Please do not put a different specie on the same formula as squirrels without contacting me first to see what formula is appropriate. Using the wrong formula for an animal can be very dangerous for the animal and can cause death.

FEEDING SCHEDULE AND DIET

The babies' eyes open at 5 weeks but they don't see well at first and nothing about their behavior will change for another 5 or 6 days; they will still eat and go back to sleep immediately. At 6 weeks, put monkey chow (called Zupreem Primate Chow and can be purchased at pet stores that sell products for exotic animals) or rodent chow (no gerbil or hamster food) into the nestbox with the baby. It will at some point begin gnawing on the monkey chow. Primate, or monkey, chow is a balanced nutrition and, in combination with fresh veggies and a diet low in nuts/seeds, has been proven to prevent metabolic bone disease, a disease that is caused by a lack of calcium in the diet.

How old is the Squirrel Baby?

- **1 to 5 days** - tiny, the size of a woman's thumb - knuckle to tip - and totally pink; no hair at all.
- **5 to 10 days** - development of soft, reddish, sable hair around nose and mouth.
- **10 days to 2 weeks** - a grayish purple shadow begins spreading over the head, shoulders, and back; the belly and legs are still bright pink.
- **2 to 3 weeks** - grayish-purple color deepens until the emerging hair is long enough to be identified as hair.
- **3 weeks** - the baby's lower front teeth begin emerging. Hair is now slick, smooth, and shiny. still no hair on legs and belly.
- **4 weeks** - has light grayish-brownish hair all over, except lower legs and belly and under tail. Some downy white hair beginning on belly and legs.
- **5 weeks** - thicker hair, including legs and belly. Tail hair is short, straight, and lies parallel with the bone. Eyes open.
- **5 to 6 weeks** - upper front teeth begin emerging. Begins curling tail over back.
- **6 to 7 weeks** - fully furred, sleeping less with more active periods.
- **7 to 8 weeks** - tail is fluffy. Should be placed in a cage with plenty of room to play.
- **8 to 9 weeks** - looks like a miniature squirrel. very active and shredding your sweaters, curtains, furniture, and arms with its claws. has lost infant appearance.
- **9 to 10 weeks** - develops more muscular physique.
- **10 to 12 weeks** - about 3/4 full size - release at 12 weeks.

Feeding Schedule:

- **up to 2 weeks** - formula approximately every two hours; feeding amount: up to 1 week of age - approx .5 cc per feeding; to 2 wks - .75 to 1 cc per feeding.
- **2 to 3 weeks** - approximately every three hours; feeding amount: begin feeding the number of cc's in weeks of age - ex: 2 weeks approx 2 cc's, 3 weeks approx 3 cc's.
- **3 to 4 weeks** - 3 or 4 cc's per feeding.
- **4 to 7 weeks** - formula approximately every 4 hours; at 6 to 7 weeks offer Zupreem primate chow (or if unavailable in your area, use dry Science Diet for Puppies), fruit, and a couple of small slices of avocado in nest box; feeding amounts:
- **5 to 6 weeks**, the squirrel's intake will rise beyond the weeks of age guideline; give about 6 to 8 cc's per feeding, or all the baby wants if the stool remains firm.
- **7 to 9 weeks** - formula 3 times a day plus solid food listed above; add broccoli stems, green beans and other veggies except corn and sweet potatoes feeding amounts: all he wants.
- **9 - 10 weeks** - 2 times a day, plus food above and now add a small piece of fresh corn and a couple small pieces of sweet potato, other veggies feeding amounts: all he wants.
- **10 to 12 weeks** - will reject formula during this period; add to food list a couple of almonds or pecans a day, and a small handful of large stripped sunflower seeds.

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