

Caring for Newborn Puppies



What do I do to care for the newborn puppies?

The mother will spend most of her time with the puppies during the next few days. The puppies need to be kept warm and to nurse frequently; they should be checked every few hours to make certain that they are warm and well fed. The mother should be checked to make certain that she is producing adequate milk, and is not over-mothing or ignoring her pups.

During the first 2 weeks of life, the environment of the puppies should be maintained at 21-23 degrees. Any warmer and the bitch will overheat. A heat lamp must be provided in the whelping box at 27 degrees for the puppies to sit under. Puppies behaviour will give a guide to whether they are comfortable. If they are warm and content they will be quiet and gaining weight.

We recommend identifying the pups using different colour ribbon/collars around their neck.

Using kitchen scales, the pups are weighed twice daily and their weight recorded. It is not uncommon for pups to lose weight in the first 24 hours, but then they should gain weight thereafter. Pups weight should increase by 10% per day. For example a pup weighing 200g should gain 20g and weigh 220g by day 2, then gain 22g and weigh 242g the following day etc.

If they are not gaining weight (or even losing weight) please seek veterinary care immediately. Waiting 24 hours for veterinary care could be the difference between saving the puppy or not. '**Fading puppy syndrome**' occurs quickly. If the pup isn't suckling properly they become dehydrated and low in glucose and weaken further. They lose their ability to suck altogether and the cycle worsens. They become cold and die within hours. Early and aggressive treatment with glucose injections, subcutaneous fluids, warmth, and stomach tube feeding will often save the puppy.

If the mother feels the puppies are in danger or if there is too much light she may become anxious. Placing a sheet or cloth over most of the top of the box to obscure much of the light may resolve the problem. An enclosed box is also a solution. Some dogs, especially first-time mothers, are more anxious than others. Such dogs may attempt to hide their young, even from the owner. If the bitch continues to move her puppies from place to place, some attempt at confinement may be worthwhile. However, if she is still unsettled, veterinary advice should be sought since the puppies will certainly be endangered if they are placed in a cold or draughty

location. If the bitch becomes too distressed she could kill her puppies as a means of "protecting" them from danger.

What are the signs that the puppies are not doing well and what should I do?

Puppies should feed and sleep 90% of the time during the first two weeks. Noisy unsettled puppies indicates a problem and early treatment is needed. Keep an eye on any weight gain, as this is a good indication to the health of the puppy.

When the milk supply is inadequate, supplemental feeding is recommended and should be performed on any litter with more than 5 or 6 puppies. There are several very good commercial formulae available. The directions on the container should be carefully followed before feeding particularly with regard to temperature. One method of testing the temperature of the feed is to drop some of the warm formula on to your forearm. It should be about the same temperature. The commercial products have directions concerning feeding amounts.

If the puppies are still nursing from their mother, the amounts recommended will be excessive. Generally $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of the listed amount should be the daily goal. Supplemental feeding may be continued until the puppies are old enough to eat puppy food.

If the mother does not produce milk or her milk becomes infected, the puppies will also cry. If this occurs, the entire litter could die within 24 to 48 hours. Total replacement feeding, using the mentioned products, or finding a foster mother is usually necessary. The owner of the stud dog (if a breeder), your local veterinary surgeon, or other breeders may be able to help with this.

If replacement feeding is chosen, the amounts listed on the product container should be fed. Puppies less than 2 weeks of age should be fed every 3 hours. Puppies 2-4 weeks of age do well with feedings every 4-6 hours.

Weaning in these circumstances, should begin as early as possible and certainly no later than about 3 weeks of age.

What should I expect during the first few weeks of life?

For the first month of life, puppies require very little care from the owner because their mother will feed and care for them. They are born with their eyes closed, but they will open in 7 to 14 days. If swelling or bulging is noted under the eyelids, they should be opened gently. Cotton wool dampened with warm water may be used to assist opening the lids. If the swelling is due to infection, pus will exit the open eyelids and should be treated as prescribed by a veterinary surgeon. If the eyes have not opened at 14-16 days of age, or if there is any pus or discharge, consult your veterinary surgeon at once.

Puppies should be observed for their rate of growth. They should double their birth weight in about one week. Use kitchen scales as described above. The accuracy of the scales is not important, since it is weight increases that you are looking for.

At two weeks of age, puppies should be alert and trying to stand. At three weeks, they generally try to climb out of their box. At four weeks all of the puppies should be able to walk, run, and play.

Puppies should begin eating solid food about three and a half to four and a half weeks of age. As soon as their eyes are open, one of the bitch milk replacers should be placed in a flat saucer. The puppies' noses can be dipped into this or their noses and mouths wetted with a finger dipped into the formula. Repeat this 2 or 3 times per day until they begin to lap; this usually takes 1-3 days.

Next, Royal Canin Puppy Starter Mousse can be placed in the saucer on its own. Adding milk isn't necessary. They should be lapping this well by 4 to 6 weeks of age. As soon as they are eating well, it is worthwhile starting them on Royal Canine Puppy food (wet/dry) in addition to the Starter Mousse.

I have heard of milk fever, what exactly is it?

Eclampsia, or milk fever, is due to a depletion of calcium in the blood of the mother due to heavy milk production. It generally occurs when the puppies are 3-5 weeks old (just before weaning) and most often to mothers with large litters or with an abundance of milk as some bitches naturally have. Good mothers, especially attentive of their puppies, always seem to suffer more severely.

The mother has muscle spasms resulting in rigid legs, spastic movements, and heavy panting. This can be

fatal in 30-60 minutes, so a veterinary surgeon should be consulted immediately. This is a major emergency situation.

Do puppies need a special diet?

Diet is extremely important for a growing puppy. There are many commercial foods specially formulated for puppies. These foods meet their unique nutritional requirements and should be fed until 12-18 months of age. We recommend that you buy Royal Canin food as it is well balanced and meets all of a growing puppy's nutritional requirements.

When should vaccination begin?

Puppies are provided some immunity to canine diseases from their mother before and shortly after birth. This is particularly true if the dam's vaccinations are up to date. Some of the mother's antibodies cross the placenta and enter the puppies' circulation, but most antibodies are provided in the mother's milk, particularly the first milk or colostrums. These "maternal antibodies" protect the puppies against the diseases to which the mother is immune. This explains why it is so important to ensure that any booster inoculations are administered prior to mating.

Although very protective, maternal antibodies last for only a few weeks; after this time, the puppy becomes susceptible to disease. The duration of the maternal antibodies is quite variable depending on several factors.

In general, vaccinations for the puppy should be started at about 6 weeks of age. Puppies should be vaccinated against distemper, hepatitis, kennel cough and parvovirus. Other vaccines are also available for certain situations, and will be discussed at the time of the first visit for vaccinations.

Do all puppies have worms?

Intestinal parasites ("worms") are common in puppies. Sometimes no signs are apparent but often poor condition, chronic soft or bloody faeces, loss of appetite, a pot-bellied appearance, loss of luster of the hair coat, and weight loss are seen. Some parasites are transmitted from the mother to her offspring and others are carried by fleas. Some are transmitted through the faeces of an infected dog. Very seldom are these parasites visible in the faeces. Their detection depends on demonstration of their eggs under a microscope.

Generally puppies are wormed from about 2 weeks of age and medication is usually supplied by your veterinary surgeon at the time of the post natal examination.