

Raising Puppies

Raising puppies can be an extremely rewarding experience or it may produce frustration and failure. The following information is provided in order to increase your chances of success.

What do I do to care for the newborn puppies?

The mother will spend most of her time with the puppies during the first few days. The puppies need to be kept warm and nurse frequently. They should be checked every few hours to ensure they are warm and well fed. The mother should be checked to make certain that she is producing adequate milk.



If the mother does not stay in the box, the puppies' temperatures must be monitored. If the puppies are cold, supplemental heating should be provided. During the first four days of life, the newborn puppies' box should be maintained at 85° to 90°F (29.4° to 32.2°C). The temperature may gradually be decreased to 80°F (26.7°C) by the seventh to tenth day and to 72°F (22.2°C) by the end of the fourth week. If the litter is large, the external temperature doesn't have to be as warm. As puppies huddle together, their body heat provides additional warmth.

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 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. Moving from place to place may continue and can endanger the puppies if they are placed in a cold or drafty location. Dogs with this behavior should be caged in a secluded area. This type of mother has also been known to kill her puppies as a means of "protecting" them from danger.

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

Puppies should eat or sleep 90% of the time during the first two weeks of life. If they are crying during or after eating, they are usually becoming ill or are not receiving adequate milk. A newborn puppy is very susceptible to infections and can die within 24 hours. If excessive crying occurs, the mother and entire litter should be examined by a veterinarian promptly.

When the milk supply is inadequate, supplemental feeding one to three times per day is recommended and should be performed on any litter with greater than five puppies. There are

several commercial milk replacers available. They require no preparation other than warming. They should be warmed to 95° to 100°F (35° to 37.8°C) before feeding. Its temperature can be tested on one's forearm; it should be about the same as your skin. An alternative is canned goats' milk that is available in most grocery stores. The commercial products have feeding directions. If the puppies are still nursing from their mother, feed 1/3 to 1/2 of the listed amount. 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 can die within 24 to 48 hours. Total replacement feeding using the mentioned products or adopting the puppies to another nursing mother is usually necessary. If replacement feeding is chosen, the feeding amounts listed on the product should be used. Puppies less than two weeks of age should be fed every 3-4 hours. Puppies two to four weeks of age do well with feedings every 6-8 hours. Weaning, as described below, should begin at three to four weeks of age.

What should I expect during the puppies' 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. Puppies are born with their eyes closed. Most puppies will begin to open their eyes within seven to fourteen days of birth. If there is swelling or bulging underneath the eyelids, they should be opened gently. A cotton ball 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 by a veterinarian. If the eyes have not opened within fourteen days of age, they should be examined by a veterinarian.

Puppies should be observed for their rate of growth. They should double their birth weight in about one week.

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 3½ to 4½ weeks of age. Initially, make a gruel by mixing a milk replacer in puppy food soaked in water and place this mixture in a flat saucer. The puppies' noses should be dipped into it two or three times per day until they begin to lap; this usually takes one to three days. Next, canned or dry puppy food should be placed in the milk replacer or water until it is soggy. As the puppies lap, they will also ingest the food. The amount of moisture should be decreased daily until they are eating the canned or dry food with little or no moisture added (usually by four to six weeks of age).

I have heard of milk fever. What exactly is it?

Eclampsia, or milk fever, is a depletion of calcium from the mother due to heavy milk production. It generally occurs when the puppies are three to five weeks old (just before weaning) and most often to mothers with large litters. The mother has muscle spasms resulting in rigid legs, spastic movements, and heavy panting. This can be fatal in 30-60 minutes, so a veterinarian should be consulted immediately.

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 twelve to eighteen months of age. Puppy foods are available in dry and canned formulations.

We recommend that you buy FOOD FORMULATED FOR PUPPIES. Adult formulations are not recommended since they do not provide the nutrition required for a puppy. Advertisements tend to promote taste rather than nutrition, so one should be careful that their influence on purchasing habits is not detrimental to one's dog. Generic foods should be avoided. Table food is not recommended; although often more appealing than dog food, balanced, complete nutrition is usually compromised.

We recommend that you buy NAME BRAND FOOD RECOMMENDED BY YOUR VETERINARIAN. It is generally a good idea to avoid generic brands of food. We recommend that you only buy food that has the AAFCO (American Association of Feed Control Officials) certification. Usually, you can find this information very easily on the food label. AAFCO is an organization that oversees the entire pet food industry. It does not endorse any particular food, but it will tell you if the food has met the minimum requirements for nutrition, which are set by the industry. Most of the commercial pet foods will have the AAFCO label. In Canada, look for foods approved by the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA).

When should vaccinations begin?

Puppies are provided some immunity to canine diseases before and shortly after birth. The mother's antibodies cross the placenta and enter the puppies' circulation. Some antibodies are also provided in the mother's milk. These "maternal antibodies" protect the puppies against the diseases to which the mother is immune. This explains why it is desirable to booster the mother's vaccinations within a few months prior to breeding.

Although very protective, maternal antibodies last for only a few weeks; after this time, the puppy becomes susceptible to disease. The vaccination program should be started at about six to eight weeks of age. Puppies should be vaccinated against canine distemper, hepatitis, parainfluenza virus, parvovirus, and rabies. Other vaccines are also available for certain situations, and will be discussed at the time of the first visit for vaccinations.



Maternal antibodies are passed in the mother's milk only during the first one to three days after delivery. If, for any reason, the puppies do not nurse during this important period of time, their vaccinations should begin about four weeks of age, depending on likely disease exposure. A veterinarian can make

specific recommendations for each particular situation.

Do all puppies have worms?

Intestinal parasites ("worms") are common in puppies. Symptoms include poor overall condition, chronic soft or bloody stools, loss of appetite, a pot-bellied appearance, loss of luster of the haircoat, and weight loss. Some parasites are transmitted from the mother to her offspring and others are carried by fleas. Some are transmitted through the stool of an infected dog. Very few of these parasites are visible in the stool, so their eggs must be detected by the veterinarian with a microscope.

A microscopic examination of the feces will reveal the eggs of most of these parasites. Generally this test should be performed at the time of the first vaccinations. However, it may be performed as early as three weeks of age if a parasite problem is suspected. Treatment is based on the type of parasites found although some veterinarians elect to treat all puppies because they know that fecal tests can be falsely negative. Your veterinarian should be consulted for specific recommendations for your puppies. You should not administer any over-the-counter de-worming compounds without first consulting your veterinary hospital.

ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS: