

Caring for Orphaned Puppies

- Orphaned puppies should be taken to a veterinarian immediately. Your veterinarian can give you advice on caring for puppies and might be able to provide you with contact information for animal rescue groups.
- During the first few weeks of life, puppies have specific needs for nourishment, warmth, socialization, and excretion.
- Female puppies should be spayed around 6 months of age; male puppies should be neutered between 5 and 10 months of age. This helps to control pet overpopulation and reduces the chances of some behavior problems and medical conditions that can be costly to treat and difficult to cure (e.g., pyometra [uterine infection] or breast cancer in female dogs).

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Feeding

A mother dog's milk provides all the nutrients that her puppies need during their first 4 weeks of life. If you find orphaned puppies, ask your veterinarian or an animal welfare group to help you find a mother dog with a small litter because she may be able to nurse the puppies. If you cannot find a foster mother dog, ask your veterinarian to teach you how to bottle-feed or tube feed the puppies with a commercial puppy formula milk replacer. Feeding newborn puppies incorrectly can cause harm, and feeding cow's milk or an inappropriate milk replacer can cause diarrhea and other complications.

Many people prefer to bottle-feed puppies because they stop suckling when they are satisfied. Bottle-fed puppies require an appropriately sized bottle and nipple to prevent swallowing of the nipple. Nipple bottles made for orphaned puppies or premature human infants can be used.

Tube feeding is faster than bottle-feeding, especially with large litters. Tube feeding is useful for puppies younger than 10 days or puppies that are weak or that have poor suckle reflexes.

Newborn puppies should be tube fed four times daily or bottle-fed five or six times daily. At 2 weeks of age, four feedings per day are usually sufficient.

Follow all the manufacturer's directions on formula preparations. Refrigerate milk formula between meals, but warm it to approximately 100°F before feeding. Prepare only a 48-hour supply of formula at a time. Cold formula, rapid feeding, and overfeeding can cause regurgitation, bloating, diarrhea, and/or aspiration (inhalation of formula or food). To help prevent diarrhea and aspiration, feed small amounts frequently rather than large amounts infrequently. Ask your veterinarian for additional information and recommendations.

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At around 4 weeks of age, puppies can be transitioned from receiving milk replacer to eating solid food. During the transition, high-quality dry puppy kibble can be soaked with warm water and milk replacer and blended to the consistency of gruel. Use a shallow saucer in case the puppy falls into the food. This mixture can be fed to the puppy several times a day. Water can also be offered in a shallow saucer. Gradually, the amount of milk replacer mixed into the puppy food can be decreased until the puppies are eating dry kibble by about 7 to 8 weeks of age. Consult your veterinarian for the exact amount to feed and for help creating a long-term feeding schedule suited to the puppies' needs.

Caring for Your New Pet

When the puppies are ready for solid food, feed a name-brand puppy food with the American Association of Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) statement on the bag or label. This ensures that the food is nutritionally balanced for puppies.

Cleaning

Puppies tend to get messy during feedings, so they need to be cleaned regularly. Gently wipe them clean using a washcloth moistened with warm water. Dry them immediately with a towel or hair dryer set on low.

Weight

The average recommended birth weight for puppies depends on the breed. During the first weeks of life, a puppy's weight may double or triple. Gaining 10% to 15% of birth weight daily is considered healthy. It is very helpful to weigh the puppy at the same time every day to ensure the puppy is steadily gaining weight.

Handling

Puppies should not be overhandled during the first 2 weeks of life, and they require a lot of sleep. Handle them only as much as necessary to keep them warm, clean, and fed. When puppies are 3 weeks of age, handle them in short sessions a few times a day. Children can be allowed to gently handle them under adult supervision. A content puppy will sleep for a period of time, wake up periodically to eat and urinate/defecate, then sleep again.

Providing Warmth

For the first 2 weeks of life, orphaned puppies must be kept warm. Ask your veterinarian about the ideal temperature of heat sources such as a heating pad or a hot water bottle wrapped in a towel. Be sure that the heat source is not too warm and that the puppies can move away from it to cool down. If you use a heating pad, monitor it to ensure that it is functioning properly and that the temperature is not too high.

Encouraging Excretion

During their first few weeks of life, puppies can't urinate and defecate (excrete) on their own. After

feeding, a mother dog grooms her puppies, especially in the anal area to stimulate urination and defecation. To encourage orphaned puppies to excrete, after each meal, dip a soft washcloth or a cotton ball in warm water and gently massage the puppies' anal and urinary areas; the warmth, texture, and movement mimic a mother dog's tongue. Puppies begin excreting on their own at about 3 or 4 weeks of age.

Veterinary Care

A physical examination by your veterinarian should be scheduled as soon as you obtain an orphaned puppy. This examination can provide an opportunity to (1) identify birth defects and other health issues, (2) address questions about feeding and other home care, and (3) schedule a preventive health plan.

If puppies appear healthy, most veterinarians recommend that they receive their first round of standard vaccinations at around 6 weeks of age. Deworming can also begin at an early age.

Contact your veterinarian immediately if your puppy has any of the following:

- Lack of appetite
- Poor weight gain (the puppy's weight doesn't double in 8 to 10 days)
- Vomiting
- Swollen or painful abdomen
- Lack of activity
- Diarrhea
- Difficulty breathing
- Coughing or wheezing
- Constant crying
- Pale gums
- Swollen eyes or eye discharge
- Nasal discharge
- Inability to pass urine or stool

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