



Raising Orphan Puppies

Hand raising puppies is not for the faint of heart. Puppies require immense care for the first 4-6 weeks of life. Puppies are fragile and may perish, occasionally making the experience rather heart wrenching. However, raising puppies can also be an incredibly rewarding experience.

The Nest Box

Keep the puppies together as long as they are about the same age and size. This will help keep them warm and help with socialization, comfort, and learning. The nest box in which the babies live should have tall sides so that they cannot climb out by mistake and become chilled. Cardboard pet carriers or plastic totes work well.

Place towels in the bottom of the box and cover them with a disposable puppy pad so the babies rest directly on the pad. Expect to change the puppy pad several times daily. Clean the box itself once a day (or sooner if dirty). Keeping the babies clean and dry is extremely important and a puppy pad is perfect for wicking away wetness.

Place a heating pad under the nest box so that only half of the nest box is warmed. This way the babies may crawl off the warm side of the box if they feel too hot. Alternatively, a water bottle filled with warm water or rice warmies can be buried in the blankets as a heat source as long as the babies have room to move away from it if they are too hot. If the baby's temperature drops below 98°F, the heart rate drops and intestinal motion ceases. *Death occurs if this is not corrected.* Initial warming when babies have gotten cold should take place over an hour or two to avoid shock.

The Diet

There are several brands of orphan formula on the market. Both powder and liquid forms are available. The liquid forms more commonly cause diarrhea than the powder form. You can also adjust the amount of water added to the powder form in case of dehydration. Only a puppy formula should be used -this is the closest nutrient content to a mother dog's milk. Do not substitute cow or goat milk.

Tube feeding involves using a syringe and lubricated tube to introduce formula through the mouth and directly into the stomach. Your veterinarian will need to show you how to do this should it become necessary. A baby who rejects three meals in a row will need tube feeding.

Dogs are omnivores and have very different milk contents than ruminants. DO NOT use condensed milk as this can cause severe diarrhea and abnormal blood sugar levels. The puppy formula should be warmed to 98-99°F before administration.

Mix up the powder according to the directions on the can. If you are using the liquid form, you may want to dilute it with one part water for every two parts of formula. As the babies get older, less water may be used whether you are mixing up the powder or the liquid. If diarrhea occurs at any time, you should add more water to the formula to make up for fluid lost as diarrhea.

Store the can of powder in the freezer after opening. Do not mix up more than a day's worth of formula. You can use a blender to mix the formula several hours ahead to allow time for the bubbles to settle.

The Bottle

Obtain a pet nurser bottle from a pet store or your veterinarian. Use a hot needle to make a hole in the nipple. The hole should be big enough that formula will slowly drip out if the bottle is held upside-down and gently squeezed. The nipple should not collapse when the baby is sucking.

How / When to Feed

Expect to feed them every two to three hours during the day. If this is done, the babies should be able to sleep through the night. Do not wake the babies at feeding time. Let them sleep. When they wake up hungry, they will let you know.

During feeding be sure to tip the bottle so that no air is swallowed. It is more natural to feed them right side up rather than on their backs like human infants. Play with/rub them after feeding to burp them. Occasionally small amounts of formula will come out of the nose. This means the puppy is drinking too fast. If excessive amounts of formula appear to be coming out the nose or if you are concerned, call your veterinarian.

Warm the bottle in a cup of hot water. Always test the formula before giving it to the babies. Smell it to be sure it is not sour. Do not use a microwave oven to heat the bottle as it may not heat evenly - some areas of the bottle can be scalding hot.

The best way to be sure everything is going well is to track weight gain. A postal scale or food scale (ideally one that measures weight in grams) will be helpful.

A puppy or kitten should gain 10% of the birth weight every day and should be drinking 22 to 26 cc of formula per 100 grams of body weight over the course of the day.

Puppies are variable in growth expectancy depending on breed.

Urination / Defecation

Infant animals are unable to take care of these matters alone and must be given help. Normally their mother's tongue does the job as she washes them. Use a cotton ball with warm water to gently rub the baby's genital area. Have a tissue ready to catch the urine. Rubbing the anal area as well may also be necessary if the babies do not seem to be defecating as much as expected. Watch for diarrhea. Normal infant stool is loose but should not be watery. Expect the babies to need stimulation for urination/defecation for the first three weeks of life.

It is normal for baby kittens and puppies to have round bellies. If you think the baby might be constipated, usually taking the temperature rectally with a normal rectal thermometer provides enough extra stimulation to get things back to normal. Only the bulb of the thermometer tip needs to be inserted rectally.

Bathing

Using kitten or puppy shampoo and warm water, bathe the babies once daily. Urine will burn their tender skin and caked feces can lead to infection, so keeping the babies clean is important. Do not submerge the infant in water. Be careful that it cannot drown or choke on the water and be sure the

water temperature is acceptable. Gently blow dry the babies when the bath is over. Do not allow chilling.

Starting Solid Food

When the babies start biting and chewing at their bottle instead of sucking (three to four weeks of age), they may be started on some finely textured canned food for puppies. At first it may be necessary to mix this more solid food with a little formula and /or smear a little around their mouths gently with a finger. They should begin readily accepting solid food at four to six weeks of age. New homes may be found for them at age eight weeks.

A Note on Colostrum

Colostrum is the first milk produced by the mother shortly after giving birth. It is rich in antibodies which will protect the babies for the first several months of life. Colostrum is only produced for a day or two and the baby is only able to absorb its antibodies for a day or two. Without colostrum (if their mother did not nurse the kittens during the first two days of life) the babies have a serious immunological disadvantage. Especially great care should be taken in cleanliness.

Veterinary Care

The puppies need to be dewormed with a puppy-safe roundworm dewormer (such as pyrantel) at 2, 4, and 6 weeks of age. They should be examined by their veterinarian at 6 weeks of age. Vaccines will be started at this visit if the puppies are healthy and large enough. Further vaccination should be done by your veterinarian at 8, 12, and 16 weeks of age. Your vet will perform a full exam to check health, development, and to help prepare for any future care they may need.

*This information was compiled and adapted from VIN Partners:
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