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Breeding for Dog Owners – Rearing the Puppies and Care of the Mother

If the delivery was without incident, what do I have to do to care for the newborn puppies?

For the next two months, even if everything went smoothly with the birth, you have a lot of work to do! After the birthing process, clean up the mother as much as possible without upsetting her. Remove any of the soiled newspaper or bedding from her whelping box.

Normally the new mother will spend most of her time with the puppies. For the first few days it may be difficult to get her to leave the nest to go to the bathroom. However, it is important that



she continue to urinate and defecate normally. Do not be afraid of putting her on a collar and leash and taking her out for a short period if she refuses to go on her own. She will only want to be out for a few minutes but during that time you can clean up the bed and make the whelping box safe for the puppies.

Before she returns to her puppies, check her nipples and vulva to make sure there are no problems such as bleeding, foul smelling discharges, or anything else you are unsure about.

What sort of problems am I looking for?

Check the vulva to see if there is much discharge. After twenty-four hours, the vulvar discharge should be minimal. It is normally a greenish-black color and if she has not expelled all her afterbirths during birthing, the discharge may be quite copious. However, it should lessen significantly after twenty-four to forty-eight hours. If not, contact your veterinarian.

Check her teats (nipples) to make sure that none are swollen, hot, hard or tender. If you find anything abnormal, call your veterinarian.

Do I have to check the puppies?

It is worthwhile, particularly with a first time mother, to check the puppies every few hours to make sure they are all suckling and are warm and contented. Any that are crying or appear cold should be placed on the inguinal (hind) teats and checked frequently to make sure they are not pushed away by the other puppies. The teats between the hind legs usually give the most milk.

Is it necessary for me to have a post-natal veterinary check?

It is important to have the mother and puppies examined by your veterinarian within forty-eight hours of birth. The veterinarian will check the mother to make sure there is no infection and that she is producing sufficient milk. The puppies will also be examined to make sure that there are no abnormalities such as cleft palates. Any necessary medications or injections will be administered during this visit.

What shall I do if the mother refuses to stay with the puppies?

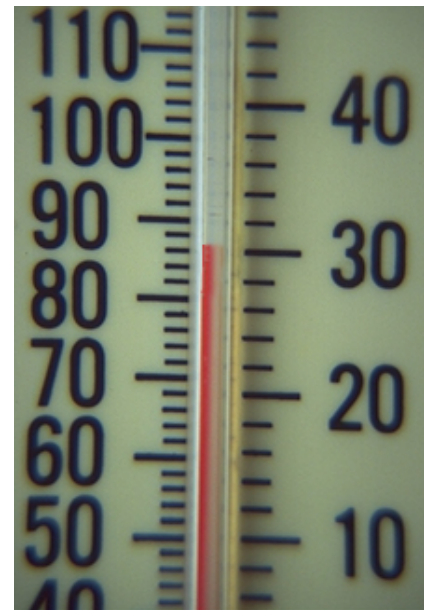
This is not uncommon with pets that are closely attached to their owners. If the mother will not stay with her puppies, try relocating her and her family so she can be nearer to you. Make sure the puppies are not cold. Remember they cannot maintain their own body heat for a week or two after birth.

During the first four days of life the environmental temperature where the puppies are kept should be maintained at 85 -90°F (29.5-32°C). The temperature may then be gradually decreased to approximately 80°F (26.7°C) by the seventh to tenth day and to about 72°F (22.2°C) by the end of the fourth week.

It is not necessary to heat the whole room to these temperatures. Heating over the whelping box with the aid of a heat lamp is usually all that is necessary.

The larger the litter the lower the environmental temperature needs to be, since the puppies huddle together and keep each other warm.

The puppies' behavior and condition gives an indication whether they are comfortable and healthy. If they are warm and content they will be quiet and gaining weight, otherwise they will be restless and vocalizing.



Should I weigh the puppies regularly?

Yes. Electronic kitchen or postal scales allow accurate and regular weighing of puppies. This gives a guide to their condition and progress.

Is it necessary to keep the mother and puppies in subdued light?

In the wild, dogs will find a secluded whelping place, usually a dark or sheltered spot. Some dogs, if they feel their puppies are too exposed, may become anxious and start carrying them around the house. Placing a blanket over part of the top of the box may resolve the problem. A small enclosed box is also a solution.

Some females are more anxious than others, particularly with their first litter. They may try to hide their puppies, even from the owners. If the mother does not like the place you have selected for her, try to compromise. If she is still unsettled, please contact your veterinarian since stress can affect her milk supply and may cause problems with the pups.

I am told that some female dogs will actually kill and eat their puppies. Is this true?

In the wild, a dog with puppies is vulnerable to all sorts of predators. If the puppies become vocal and distressed, the danger of attack by a predator increases. The primeval protective instinct will sometimes surface in even the gentlest pet. This occurs in some breeds more than others. Killing the puppies and sometimes eating them is a method of averting a perceived danger.

Since I have not raised a litter before, how can I tell if there is a problem?

During the first two weeks of life, before their eyes open, puppies should feed and sleep for at least 90% of the time. If you are weighing the puppies regularly (once a day), there should be a consistent increase in weight. If any of the puppies appear restless or noisy, this may indicate a lack of nourishment or infection.

If you are concerned please consult your veterinarian as soon as possible.

Declining weight in a puppy should arouse your suspicion. Keep careful records of your newborn puppies' weights. Identify the puppies with permanent markers. You may make a mark on the abdomen to identify each puppy easily (you can use various colors of permanent markers).



How will I know if the mother's milk supply is adequate?

A contented litter of plump puppies is the best indication that the mother is producing adequate milk. Any puppies that appear restless and do not have fat tummies will benefit from supplemental feeding one to three times a day. Please contact your veterinarian, who can supply the necessary food and feeders. It is important that any supplementary food is fed at the correct temperature. One rule of thumb is to drop some of the warm, puppy milk replacer on your arm. It should not feel about the same as your normal body temperature.

All the commercial products carry detailed instructions regarding preparation and feeding amounts. Your veterinarian will advise you on supplemental feedings for your specific situation. .

I understand that the mother may develop infection or inflammation of the breasts without warning?

Inflammation and infection of the breasts is called *acute mastitis* and can occur very quickly. This is the reason that mother's mammary glands should be checked regularly for any abnormal discharge, inflammation, tenderness or hardness.

If the mother does not produce milk or her milk is infected, the puppies will not be nourished and will start to cry and lose weight. If this occurs, an entire litter can die within twenty-four to forty-eight hours. Total replacement feeding either via a foster mother or with milk replacer products is necessary. Please contact your veterinarian for advice.

Is this the same as “milk fever”?

No. Mastitis is an infection of the mammary glands. *Eclampsia* or milk fever is due to a depletion of calcium in the blood of the mother due to heavy milk production and is not due to infection.

Eclampsia occurs most commonly when the puppies are three to five weeks of age and the mother is producing the most milk. Eclampsia is not due to an overall lack of calcium; it merely indicates that she cannot mobilize sufficient supplies of stored calcium quickly enough to meet her metabolic needs. Females that are particularly good mothers, especially attentive to their puppies, seem to be more likely to develop eclampsia.



I understand that milk fever is a very serious condition. How can I tell if it is starting?

Eclampsia is a true medical emergency and you must contact us immediately if you think the mother is in trouble. The signs are initially subtle. The female may be restless or panting a lot, and you may notice that she is moving stiffly. This soon progresses to muscle spasms affecting the whole body, which can quickly progress to convulsing.

If you suspect eclampsia is developing, prevent the pups from suckling and contact your veterinarian immediately.

Treatment involves injections of calcium and other drugs, often intravenously. If treated quickly, recovery is usually rapid and complete.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by Ernest Ward, DVM.
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