

Care of the newborn puppies or kittens



The puppies or kittens should be ready to feed by the time you arrive home. It is important that new born animals receive the 'first milk' or colostrum within a few hours of birth. It contains antibodies to protect them against disease, as well as being lower in fat and higher in protein than ordinary milk.



If they have already received this by suckling at the veterinary practice before collection then the veterinary surgeon or nurse will advise you of this. If the mother does not appear to have enough milk, then you may need to supplement the puppies or kittens with a milk replacer.

Summary

Caesarean surgery in the bitch or queen is usually carried out in circumstances where a normal birth is not possible.

Particular care of both the mother and the young will be required immediately after surgery so it is important to follow the simple points mentioned in this leaflet.

If you have any concerns at all following the caesarean operation speak to a veterinary surgeon or nurse for advice.



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XLVets Small Animal member veterinary practices work together to share experience, knowledge and ideas to ensure the highest levels of quality and care for their client's pets. XLVet member practices provide a compassionate and caring service for all pets and at the same time offer comprehensive and up-to-date treatment in all fields of veterinary medicine and surgery.

XLVets Fact Sheet



CAESAREAN SURGERY IN YOUR CAT OR DOG



This leaflet is designed to help you understand what happens if your cat or dog needs to have a caesarean and how to care for them afterwards.

Why may my cat or dog need a caesarean?

As with human patients it is generally usual for an animal to have their young naturally. In some cases however, surgery may be required to ensure a safe delivery. Sometimes a caesarean may be performed as an elective or pre-planned procedure but in the majority of cases it is carried out as an emergency.

Two examples of when a caesarean may be required rather than a natural birth:

1. Specific breeds: Some breeds of cat and dog are more prone to requiring surgery than others. This is often the cases in breeds such as Bulldogs and Persian cats that have quite broad heads.
2. Unproductive contractions: if the mother is taking an excessive amount of time to produce the puppy or kitten and there is no response to medical stimulants.

Caesarean surgery

In cats and dogs the mother is always given a general anaesthetic for the surgery. Care is taken to ensure that as little anaesthetic medication as possible passes to the puppies or kittens during this procedure.

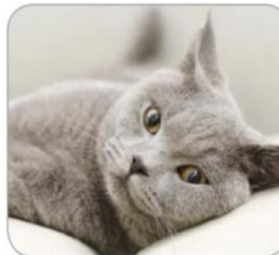
The wound following the surgery will in the majority of cases be along the midline between the two rows of nipples

After surgery, the anaesthetic effects usually wear off very quickly however, the speed at which this happens will depend very much on the health of the mother and the reason for the caesarean.

Post-operative care immediately following surgery

In the majority of cases the intention of the vet will always be to get mother and babies back into a familiar environment as quickly as possible. The following list gives some tips for care once you have settled them back at home:

- Your pet may be a little groggy for a few hours following surgery even though they are able to walk about almost normally. Do not leave the mother and new babies together unsupervised until she is fully co-ordinated and awake. Once the mother is up and about she can be offered something to drink and a light meal.
- Keep the new puppies or kittens warm and allow their fur to dry thoroughly using a heat mat or covered hot water bottle. This is especially important until the mother is able to start nursing them herself. Newborn animals are not able to regulate their temperature very well so the area immediately surrounding them should be kept warm for example with a heat lamp.
- A bloody vaginal discharge is normal following delivery of the puppies or kittens. It can often be quite heavy for several days. Your vet will arrange for a post-operative check a few days after surgery to confirm that everything is progressing normally. If the discharge persists for more than a week, changes colour or develops an unpleasant odour, contact the surgery for further advice.



Care of the bitch or queen over the next few days

Wound care:

It is important that you check the caesarean wound every day until it is healed. Collars and t-shirts to prevent interference are generally not used in these cases so careful monitoring of the area is essential. Excessive licking can slow down wound healing and introduce infection to the area. Any developing redness, heat, swelling or discharge should be considered abnormal and warrants a visit to the surgery.

Stitches may or may not need to be removed. This depends on the type of material used. As a general rule if the stitches are visible, they are removed 10-14 days following surgery.

Medication:

If medication has been dispensed the whole course must be completed unless otherwise directed by your veterinary surgeon or veterinary nurse. The medication will be explained to you when your pet is sent home and administration details will be on the label.

Feeding:

After giving birth, the mother's food intake will need to increase to ensure she is able to maintain her bodyweight and produce enough milk. It is important that she is fed a good quality puppy or kitten food during her period of nursing to provide her with sufficient calcium and energy intake. In most cases this same diet can be used for the young when they are weaned.

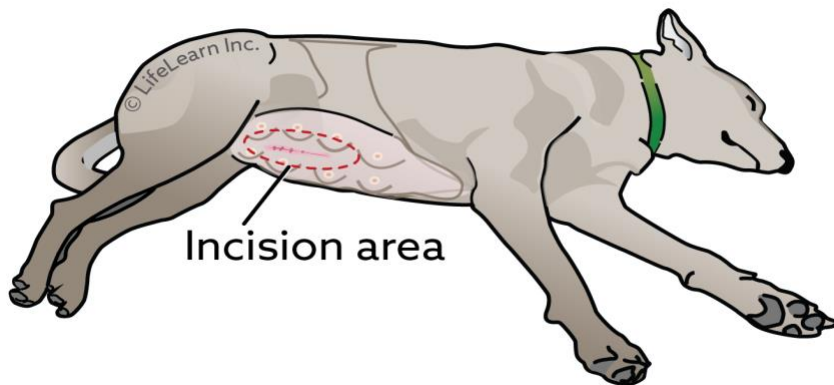
C-(Caesarean)-Sections in Dogs: Post-Operative Instructions



Small amounts of food and water frequently (every 15 to 30 minutes) for the first 24 hours after surgery.



Do not give Aspirin®, Tylenol® or any other medication, including herbal preparations, without consulting your veterinarian.



C-section, is a major surgery to remove puppies from the uterus.

This surgery is usually performed as an emergency procedure when there is difficulty with natural birth.

Most dogs recover quickly from a C-section; however, if your dog was in labor for several hours before surgery was performed, her recovery will be slower, and she will need extra attention and help with her puppies.

What should I expect during the mother's recovery period?

The mother will be given an anesthetic that should be eliminated from her body quickly. Most dogs have recovered from anesthesia by the time they are discharged to go home. Complete recovery from anesthetic may take 2 to 12 hours, depending on the anesthetics used, the mother's physical condition, her age at the time of surgery, and how long she was in labor before the surgery.

During the immediate recovery period, she must be closely monitored so she does not fall and hurt herself or roll over and crush the newborn puppies. The puppies should not be left alone with her until she is completely awake, able to stand on her own, and interested in caring for her puppies. The puppies may also be sedated from the anesthetic, and so may be sluggish and slow to nurse, at first.

The mother should begin eating within a few hours. Offer her small amounts of food and water frequently (every 15 to 30 minutes) for the first 24 hours after surgery. If she eats or drinks too much or too quickly, she may vomit. Her food intake at this time should be about 1.5 times her normal food intake. By the third or fourth week of nursing, her food intake may be two to three times normal. She should be fed a premium-brand, high-quality dog food while nursing to provide the appropriate nutrition for her and her litter. Diets that have passed AAFCO feeding trials for gestation and lactation are ideal for dogs nursing puppies. A high-quality puppy food is an alternative.

The mother's temperature may rise 1°F-2°F above normal in the first one to three days after delivery, then it should return to the normal range. The normal range is 100°F-102°F. If the mother's temperature goes above 104°F, she and her litter should be examined by your veterinarian as soon as possible. Do not give your dog acetylsalicylic acid or ASA (Aspirin®), ibuprofen (Advil®), or any other medication, including herbal preparations, without consulting your veterinarian. Your veterinarian will provide pain medication that is appropriate for nursing mothers.

Is a bloody vaginal discharge from the mother normal?

A bloody vaginal discharge is normal for three to seven days following birth. It may be quite heavy for the first one to three days after delivery and then begin to diminish. If it continues for longer than one week, changes color or develops an odor, the mother should be checked for the presence of infection or other complications. If she had an ovariohysterectomy (was spayed) at the time of the C-section, she should have little or no vaginal discharge.

When are the mother's stitches removed?

The stitches may or may not need to be removed, depending on the type of suture material used. Many veterinarians use internal, absorbable sutures that are not visible and do not require removal. As a rule, if the stitches are visible, they will have to be removed, usually 10 to 14 days after surgery. If skin staples were used, they will also require removal in 10 to 14 days.

How should I care for the puppies?

The puppies should be ready to nurse as soon as you arrive home. Although the mother may not be awake enough to nurse the puppies alone, you can help by making the mother lie still so the puppies can nurse. Gently place the puppies near the mother's teats. If a puppy seems reluctant to nurse, you may gently massage the teat to express some milk, which may induce the pup to nurse.

"If puppies are not able to nurse within the first 24 hours, they lose the immune protection provided by the first milk."

If the mother does not have enough milk at first, you may supplement the puppies with milk replacer for the first day or two. Your veterinarian should be able to supply you with a commercial puppy milk replacer such as Esbilac®, as well as nursing bottles that are the appropriate size for the puppies' tiny mouths. Many pet stores also carry these supplies.

In an emergency, the following formula may be used until you can purchase a product designed for puppies:

- 1 cup whole milk
- 1 tablespoon corn/canola oil
- 1 pinch of salt + 3 egg yolks (no whites and best if the eggs are pasteurized)

Blend the mixture until it is a uniform consistency. Feed the formula at a rate of 1 oz (30 ml) per ¼ lb (kg) of puppy weight **per 24 hours**. That amount should be divided into three to five feedings. The average newborn, small-breed puppy weighs approximately ¼ lb (⅛ kg) at birth, while a large-breed puppy weighs ½ to 1 lb (¼ to ½ kg).

It is preferable for puppies to begin nursing immediately, but a healthy newborn can survive without complication for up to 12 hours without nursing. However, if the newborn is weak, dehydrated, or cold, it must be fed as soon as possible.

If puppies are not able to nurse within the first 24 hours, they lose the immune protection provided by the first milk (colostrum), leaving them more susceptible to infectious diseases. Your vet can administer serum (liquid component of blood) orally from a healthy, vaccinated dog (usually the mother or another dog in the household) if the puppies are less than 24 hours old, or under the skin if older, to try to achieve the same protection the puppies would have received from colostrum.

How warm should the puppies' room be?

A newborn puppy is not able to regulate its body temperature well. If the puppies stay near their mother, the room temperature is not critical. However, if they are not with their mother, the room temperature should be 85°F-90°F. To avoid any chance of hypothermia or hyperthermia (chilling or overheating), the newborns should be kept inside the house if possible.

For further information about puppy care, see the handouts “Breeding for Dog Owners: Caring for Newborn Puppies” and “Raising Puppies”. Other handouts in this series contain further information about intestinal parasites, infectious diseases, and vaccinations. Your veterinarian can provide you with this information and give you specific advice.

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