

# Looking After Newborn Puppies

Advice from our veterinarians at NVC on how to properly care for newborn puppies at home.

Newborn puppies can be both exciting and stressful! More stressful if the litter is unexpected! In order to help alleviate some of this stress so you can enjoy your new little bundles of joy we have put together this guide on caring for newborn puppies so you know what to expect at each stage and what you can do to help the puppies on their way to growing into happy and healthy adult dogs!



## Newborn puppy care week by week guide:

### 1. Week One

- a. At one week of age, newborn puppy care is relatively simple. Newborn puppies will sleep most of the time and when they are awake, they will be focused on feeding as it's hard work growing after all!
- b. Check them over - it is important not to handle the puppies excessively during this stage and that you give them time and space in order to bond with mom and the other litter mates. Look for abnormal signs such as abnormal facial conformation, if they have any eye, ear or other defects. Look for a cleft palate and if you notice one, take them to your veterinarian ASAP as nursing may present a challenge for the puppies affected by a cleft palate.

- c. Ensure they are feeding properly. Make sure puppies are getting enough food from mom. Colostrum is extremely important and is part of the mom's milk that is rich in antibodies and helps protect them during the early stages of life.
- d. Start weighing the puppies regularly. Weigh them early on and keep a chart of the weights and update it each day to ensure the puppies are gaining adequate weight. By 10 days old, puppies should typically be double their birth weight.
- e. Keep them warm! Puppies have small bodies and it doesn't take much for them to become too cold. Thermoregulation is something newborn puppies are not very good at. Warmth is received from mom but mom may not always be in the whelping box with the puppies. Mom's absence from her puppies is fine as long as she is keeping them fed well and happy. However, you may need to find another heat source for when mom is out and about. Space heaters in the room or heat lamps that, as long as not too close to the puppies, can provide additional warmth to the puppies. As always, before utilizing heat sources, please speak with your veterinarian to ensure these are safe options to use.
- f. Clean out the whelping box regularly. This is important and keeping the puppies in a nice clean environment will help prevent disease and keep them (and mom) happy!

## **2. Week Two**

- a. Start turning down the heat. At this point in the puppies' lives, they are getting much better at thermoregulation. If you are providing an external source of heat, you can begin turning it down at this point.
- b. Continue weighing the puppies. This is important to ensure that they are still gaining appropriate weight. Weight gain may not be as fast as it was in the first week but they should still be gaining and especially NOT losing weight.
- c. Start deworming. Your veterinarian can begin working with you on this protocol.

## **3. Week Three**

- a. During the first two weeks of the puppies' lives, they won't be able to support their weight and will typically crawl around on their belly. However, at three weeks, they will start walking typically, albeit a bit wobbly! Their ears at this age will begin to open up as well and they

will begin to hear the sounds around them. Milk teeth will also begin to develop at three weeks of age.

- b. Handling them more frequently. The most exciting part about having puppies! You can now begin more frequent handling of the puppies. Get them used to being picked up but carefully and hold them for a short period of time, then place them back in the whelping box. This is crucial so that they understand people aren't scary!
- c. Continue weighing! At this stage, rather than every day, you can reduce the weighing frequency to once every 3-7 days.
- d. Continue lowering the heat source to around 74 degrees fahrenheit.
- e. Begin offering water. You can now start offering your puppies water at this stage of their life. Get a shallow, puppy-safe dish and place it in the whelping box with them so that they can begin exploring and checking out the water bowl.

#### **4. Week Four**

- a. Now your puppies should be walking more confidently and it is likely that they will be tearing around through your house!
- b. Check their development. Look at how they are walking and check their limb conformation. Are they able to support themselves properly? Do all of the limbs look proportional to each other?
- c. Keep an eye on behavior. If any of the puppies seem to be withdrawn or timid, this may be a sign that there is something wrong and it is a good idea to get them checked out.
- d. Begin offering soft foods. You can now start introducing soft puppy food at this point. Make sure it is not too solid or hard as they still have their milk teeth.
- e. Deworming again! Puppies should be dewormed roughly every 14 days until they are about 12 weeks old.



## **5. Week Five**

- a. At five weeks, you will have a litter of very independent puppies on your hands! They will be exploring and investigating everything and will be full of life and energy!
- b. Spend more time with them. Handle the puppies more frequently and make time for plenty of playing and cuddling.
- c. Increase solid food intake. Mom will have naturally reduced the amount she feeds them at this point so it is time to introduce more solid food. Ensure that you are choosing a good quality puppy food that is for growth and remember that they still have their milk teeth. If you are giving kibble, continue to soften it with water.

## **6. Week Six - Eight**

- a. At this stage, the puppies will begin losing their milk teeth and the period of fear will begin where they learn to be afraid of things. It is helpful to introduce them to as many household sights and sounds to help them acclimate. Puppies will be ready to fly the coop around 8 weeks of age, so this part of the newborn puppy care schedule is about preparing them for their new homes.
- b. Time to vaccinate. Please visit our life stages section ([link to life stages handout on website](#)) for information on vaccinations.
- c. Deworm again. Puppies should again be dewormed at 6 weeks of age and again at 8 weeks, continuing every 4 weeks until they are 12 weeks of age.
- d. Transitioning to a full solid diet. At this stage, they should be fully transitioned to a full solid diet.

If you have any questions or concerns about the development of your puppies, always consult with your veterinarian. Remember, at the end of the day, it is better to play it safe when in doubt!