



South Africa`s Hedgehog Breeders Association

Oopsies: Mother and baby care:

This is part of the SAHBA`s Breeders course, but very often non breeders have accidental litters or bought in a female not knowing she were pregnant. Causing the new owner to be distressed on how to deal with the situation.

Care taking of mother and babies are crucial. Pregnant females should get extra nutritional food throughout the pregnancy and while nursing the babies. It is also important for females to receive probiotics and vitamins during this period.

Extra treats to be put out daily, such as proteins (meaty stuff), to ensure that the mother will not lose weight, or become malnourished in this time. Some breeders also give females Royal Canine Mother and Baby dry food to make sure she is well fed and have all the required calcium. This is not a must, as your regular cat food do contain calcium. It is just another extra precautionary measure taken. The better the mother is taken care off, the healthier the babies will be. The better the condition the female are in, the more milk she will have. Ample supply of mother`s milk results into bigger and healthier babies. If the female fears that she won`t have enough milk for all the babies, she might kill the smallest or weakest baby. Please note that even well-fed females can have small or weak babies. This very often happens when the litter is large.

Mothers must never be stressed out as well during this time. The highest risk will be that the female may kill the babies, but a stressful environment can result into a lack of milk.

Before we dive into different situations you might encounter, lets first look at hedgehog baby development:

Newborn to 3 days of age:

They can weigh between 7 and 15 grams on average. Depending on the litter size. Smaller litters will obviously result into bigger babies. They will be blind and death (ear canals still closed) They are born with a slime gel coat that will dry up quickly after birth. Once the gel coat is dried up, the soft fuzzy quills will appear. You might notice that some babies have birthing bruises and some have scratches, that it when the mother moved them and not intended bites or injuries.



Few hours after birth



Two days old



Three days old.

One week old:

Weighing 10-35 grams. The quills will be very soft in the first week. In the first days after birthing their colour will start to develop. Their bellies will be wrinkly and hairless. Babies might crawl around a bit but does not much more than sleeping and drinking.



Seven days old



Female seven days old.

Two weeks old:

Weighing 40-50 grams. From after two weeks peach fuzz fur will start to grow and develop on the belly area up until week 4 even. They eyes starts to open from around day 12 to day 18. Some might be late bloomers. They will anoint a lot if you pick them up. Some might start anointing from before 2 weeks of age.



Two weeks old

Three weeks old:

60-80 grams. The teeth always erupt after the eyes are fully open, any time from 21 days of age. They will be now adorable little wriggling creatures who love to chew on your fingers, Babies will move around a lot in the den but is not yet going outside of the nest. More hair is developing on the bellies.



Three weeks of age



Four weeks old:

80-90 grams. Babies are starting to explore the cage for short periods, are fully developed in terms of hairs and teeth. Their quills will be extremely sharp at this stage. They will start tasting on food also. Still depending on mothers' milk and lots of sleep.



Four weeks old

Five weeks old:

85-120 grams. The mother will start weaning them. Youngsters will be exploring and become more adventurous and independent. Eating more and less drinking mothers' milk. Some babies will even start to sleep away from the other babies. Showing early on their solitary nature. Some babies will already start with their quilling process.



Five weeks old

Six weeks old:

100-130 grams. Some weigh more, depending on the size of the litter. They are able to eat everything an adult hedgehog can eat and can be safely taken away from the mother. They will be quilling now; second quilling follows around 6 months of age.



Scenarios of accidental litters, what to do and not to do:

1) My male escaped and I found him in the female's cage:

Mark the day on the calendar on when this happened. As hedgehogs sometimes needs only 5 minutes to mate, you may have a possible pregnancy on hand. First thing is of course to secure the male`s cage, to prevent further escaping.

Count 35 days and mark your calendar as “expected birth date”. It can be a day or two later as well. Weigh the female weekly to see if she is gaining weight. Is she is starting to gain weight rapidly from week 2, you can prepare for babies coming. Get a solid sturdy sleeping hide that has a lid on it. This is to enables to peek in on babies without disturbing the mom. A beany or a bonding pouch is not a suitable nest. You can place a tight fitting “mattress” or mini cage liner in the bottom of sleeping hide, or line it out with fleece strips. You can leave a heap of fleece strips in the cage; the female will carry it to her nest.

Do your last cage cleaning and bathing, trimming at least 3 days before the expected birthdate. Once the babies are born, you will not be able to clean the cage for at least 3 weeks. It can be a good idea to keep a dirty blanket separate. If you want to do cage cleaning on week 3, you can give the female the dirty blanket in her hide, as it would smell familiar and make her and the babies feel safe. When doing last cage cleaning, remove extra objects such as the wheel, tunnels, dig boxes, as you don`t want her to have her babies in an unsuitable place.

Make sure her cage is in a low noise, low movement area where you can keep visitors, children, and other animals away. Loud noises, strange voices and smells can cause a female to stress out and either kill her babies or abandon them. Once the babies are born, we recommend putting a blanket over the cage so that it is dark inside.

Only give food and water for the first 2 weeks. In the first days, she won`t come out to eat, which is perfectly normal. When she does come out to eat, you can have a peek and scoop out dead babies with a spoon. Don`t use your hands to touch babies or blankets at all.

From two weeks of age, you can start taking out babies daily for a short period of time for them to get used to human handling. Inspect them for any abnormalities.

At 6 weeks males to be separated from their sisters as male hedgy`s becomes sexually active from week 7. Although clumsy at first, they will harass their sisters and mom. Before they leave to their new homes, ensures that they are weighing more than 100 grams and is eating well.

2) I didn't know my female was pregnant:

This often happens to rescuers and people buying adult hedgehogs. With this there is no pre-birth planning. The only solution is to throw blanket over cage and keep visitors away and keep the noise levels low. If you accidently opened the nest and the female is now running around with babies, put her back in her nest, pick up babies with a spoon, place them next to her, and throw a towel or blanket over her nest so that her nerves can settle.

Only give food and water for the first 2 weeks. In the first days, she won`t come out to eat, which is perfectly normal. When she does come out to eat, you can have a peek and scoop out dead babies with a spoon. Don`t use your hands to touch babies or blankets at all.

From two weeks of age, you can start taking out babies daily for a short period of time for them to get used to human handling. Inspect them for any abnormalities, especially if there is a possibility of inbreeding. Cage cleaning only at the age of 3 weeks.

Leave wet and dry food out 24/7 in the cage. From week 5 on they will eat more and drink less of mom`s milk, as she will start to wean them at this age. At week 6 they will be able to eat anything an adult hedgehog can eat and must be separated from the mom. Males also to be separated from their sisters as male hedgy`s becomes sexually active from week 7. Although clumsy at first, they will harass their sisters and mom.

Before they leave to their new homes, ensures that they are weighing more than 100 grams and is eating well.

Female kicks out a baby, or does not have enough milk:

Never take away babies from the mother, unless if it is absolutely the only way. Mother Nature is best when it comes to raising hedgehog babies. Most babies under the age of two weeks don't make it, and sometimes after the age of 2 weeks, they can die.

If you must hand raise, the resort is then kitten formula milk.

Royal Canine Kitten Formula or Kitty Milk. As for breeders, it pays off to keep a tin of formula milk in stock, but it is expensive and can expire. Another method to get you through a night or weekend, is to soak cat pellets and liquidise it, add in Protexin and feed that watery mixture to the baby.

Babies need to be fed around the clock. Never overfeed them, as it causes bloating and most of the time it is bloating that causes babies to die. Never held the baby on its back while feeding, the milk can get into the lungs.

Important part of the feeding is that babies must be stimulated (genitals) before and after feeding. Use an ear bud or cotton ball for that purpose. The cotton ball /earbud must be soaked with luke-warm water to imitates the mother's tongue. Babies must be always kept warm while being hand raised. 27 degrees being ideal temperature. It is best to keep them in a small carry-on basket if you don't have a proper nursing bin.

Be careful not to place basket with baby in the sun, they can die easily of heat exhaustion as well. You need to always have a warm water bag underneath a blanket in the basket. Water bag to be covered to prevent burn injuries.

If you have a nursing bin, put a heat pad inside at the bottom, ensure that it is completely covered.

Babies can crawl underneath something and get burnt easily. Weigh the babies daily to monitor progress.

Never hand raise babies with the idea of them being more friendly and tame. That is a bad practise, as the hand reared baby doesn't get that natural immunity that mothers milk provides, and personality is not guaranteed. In fact, hand reared babies have the reputation of becoming biters at a later stage, for being spoiled by humans.

See feeding chart on next page

African Pygmy Feeding Chart

Handrearing hoglets

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Age	Weight	Minimum ml/24 hours	Feed 1 hourly	Feed 2 hourly	Feed 3 hourly	Feed 4 hourly
New born-3 days	7-15gm	12ml/24hrs	0,5ml			
3 Days to 7 days	10-35 gm	12ml/24hrs	0,5ml			
2 Weeks	40-50gm	12ml/24hrs		1ml-1,5ml		
3 Weeks	60-80gm	15ml/24hrs			± 1 - 1.5ml	
4 Weeks	80-90gm	20ml/24hrs				± 1.5 - 2 5ml
5 Weeks	85- 120gm	25ml/24hrs				± 3 - 4ml
6 Weeks	100 - 130gm	30ml/24hrs				± 4 - 5ml

Important Notes:

- Babies not to be held on their backs while feeding
- Weigh babies in the 1st two week before and after each feeding. From week 3 you can weigh twice a day.
- Babies to be kept warm at all times (27 degrees in nursing bin)
- Stimulate babies by wiping over tummy and genitals using a warm wet cotton ball, earbud. To drop a bit of oil such as almond oil, linseed oil to the cotton ball will help prevent the tender skin to become raw or sore. They must “go” with every feeding.
- Do not overfeed the baby, but offer rather more frequent feedings to prevent bloating
- Babies never to go without feeding for 4 hours.
- Use only kitten formula and not cow`s milk. It must be body temperature, never feed cold milk.
- From week 3 / 4 you can try offering formula, using a bottle`s lid that is shallow. Continue stimulating the baby
- From week 4 you can liquidize cat pellets with the formula milk and offer that. From week 5 the baby will start eating dry pellets.