

Orphaned Puppies: How to Raise Them

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Puppies are usually orphaned when the mother (dam) is not able to adequately care for her puppies. This may be because she cannot produce milk (a condition called agalactia) or because she has behavioral or psychological abnormalities, which prevent her from adequately caring for her puppies. In rare instances, the mother may actually not be present due to death, injury, or complications arising from a difficult birthing. Some puppies may be several weeks old before their mother becomes unable to care for them.



Successful rearing of motherless puppies requires a regular schedule of appropriate feedings, elimination, playing, and sleeping all in a safe and healthy environment. The principles of raising one orphaned puppy are not significantly different than those of raising an entire orphaned litter. In most cases, an entire litter is orphaned rather than a single puppy. Raising an orphaned litter in the complete absence of a mother is time consuming but rewarding. It is very possible to hand raise an entire litter from birth with the same success rate as could be accomplished by the natural caring mother. To successfully raise an orphaned litter one must consider:

- Nutrition and weaning
- Sanitation
- Temperature and humidity
- Disease prevention
- Nurture and socialization

Healthy puppies are plump and firm, warm, quiet, and sleep most of the time. Unhealthy puppies have poor muscle tone, initial high activity levels, and cry a lot. If not assisted, they become weak, quiet, and comatose.

Nutrition and weaning

If at all possible, get the puppies to nurse from the bitch in the first 12 hours to allow for ingestion of [colostrum](#). Puppies are only able to absorb the antibodies from the colostrum for the first 24 hours of life. If the dam will continue to allow the puppies to nurse while she is made to lie still, it will decrease some of the work load on the breeder. She may decide in a few days that she is willing to care for them and remove the burden from the breeder.

Supplying adequate nutrition is always a concern in hand raising puppies. If the bitch is not able to nurse and care for the puppies, they will need to be bottle or [tube fed](#). Bottles for puppies are readily available and are the preferred method of feeding. Tube feeding is best left to trained individuals, as the tube may be inadvertently passed to the lungs and cause choking when the formula is administered. Tube feeding, although risky, is warranted in puppies failing to nurse properly. Some kennel operators have become experts at tube feeding and prefer this method, as they then know precisely how much formula each puppy has received. For most instances, however, bottle feeding is recommended. Feed a puppy while on its belly, not on its back, as is the case with human babies.

Commercially prepared puppy milk formulas are readily available and are nutritionally balanced to meet the needs of orphan puppies. Homemade milk formula recipes are also available. These are not perfectly balanced nutritionally, but will suffice for several days until commercial formulas can be obtained. Esbilac and Puppylac are well known puppy milk replacers.

Emergency Puppy Milk Replacer

1 cup whole milk (cow or goat)
1 pinch table grade salt
3 egg yolks - no whites
1 tablespoon corn oil
1/4 teaspoon liquid vitamins

Do not substitute cow's milk or goat's milk for a high quality puppy milk replacer. They are not equivalent. Do not feed raw egg whites as a biotin deficiency may occur due to an enzyme in the white part of the egg. The enzyme is destroyed with cooking. Honey may contain bacteria, which may be fatal to the puppies.

Whether using a commercial or homemade formula, only make enough formula for 1 day of feeding at a time and keep it in the refrigerator. Wash and dry the bottles and nipples or feeding tube thoroughly between feedings. Warm the puppy milk replacer in a pan of water until 98-100°F before feeding.

The puppies will need to be burped during and after each feeding. Hold them upright or over your shoulder and pat their back. Bottle or tube feeding needs to be done very carefully to prevent aspiration of the supplement with subsequent [aspiration pneumonia](#) or drowning. Substitute 2-3 tube feedings a day with bottle feeding to help satisfy the suckling reflex. This should help decrease the puppies tendency to suck on each other and possibly cause sores.

The first 48-72 hours, they should be fed every 2 hours. For the remainder of the first week, they should be fed every 3 hours during the day with two 4-hour stretches at night. The second week, the feedings should be every 4 hours during the day with one 6-hour stretch during the night. By the third week, they should be started on puppy mush 3 times a day and the bottle feeding should be continued.

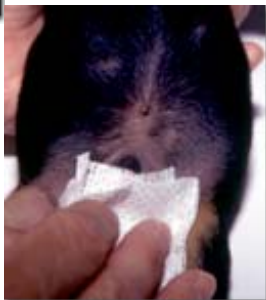
Prepare the puppy mush by placing 2 cups of high quality dry puppy food in a blender with 12.5 oz liquid puppy milk replacer and fill the rest of the blender with hot water. This should be blenderized until the consistency of human infant cereal. (This feeds 6-8 puppies of a medium-sized breed.)

By the fourth week, the mush should be fed 4-5 times a day and the amount of bottle feeding can be slowly reduced. The middle of the night feeding can be reduced and eliminated also. They can be completely on solid food by 6 weeks of age.



Divide the daily caloric requirements into the 6-12 feedings required for their age. Expect an eight-ounce (1/2 pound) puppy to consume about 30 ml (one ounce) of formula over a 24-hour period. Most milk formulas contain about 60 calories per ounce of formula, thus the eight-ounce puppy will consume about 30 calories in a 24-hour period. This is a guideline only and it is better to feed lesser amounts more often than large amounts at one time. If the puppies are not gaining weight, they need more food. If the puppies develop diarrhea, they may be overfed. Weigh each puppy at the same time a minimum of once a day for the first 10 days. Then 3-4 times a week for another 10 days. Failure of weight gain is often the first sign of illness in young animals.

Sanitation



A newborn puppy is unable to urinate or have a bowel movement on its own. It lacks the necessary muscle control over these functions. A puppy must be stimulated to urinate and defecate. This duty is normally performed by the mother. Her grooming or licking of the puppy's anal area will stimulate it to urinate and defecate. Orphaned puppies must be manually stimulated by the owner to enable urination and defecation. The puppy must be stimulated after each and every feeding. Fortunately, this is easy. A cotton ball or piece of very soft toweling works well. Moisten it with warm water and gently rub the anal and genital area. Within one to two minutes the puppy will urinate and/or defecate. Some puppies will respond better before eating while others respond better after eating. Try both times to keep the puppies healthiest. Keep a record of each puppy's urination and defecation. Puppies will need to be stimulated in

this fashion until their bladder and bowel muscles strengthen, usually by 21 days of age. Most puppies will eliminate on their own by three weeks of age.

Clean the puppy and you are done until the next feeding. Observe the urine and feces for signs of ill health. The urine should be a pale yellow or clear. If it is dark yellow or orange, the puppy is not being fed enough. Do not feed more at one time, but feed more often. The stool should be a pale to dark brown and partially formed. Green stool indicates an infection, and too firm of a stool indicates not enough formula. Again, if the stool is hard, feed more often rather than increasing the amount of formula given per feeding. It is possible to feed a puppy too much, but not too often. Too much food causes bloating, gas, regurgitation, and sometimes aspiration into the lungs.

Temperature and humidity

To remain healthy, puppies must be kept at the proper ambient temperature. Young puppies cannot conserve body heat or shiver to create heat. Supplying artificial heat sources such as an incubator, heat lamp, warm water pad or electrical heating pad will help puppies remain at the correct body temperature. Regardless of the heat source, it is very important not to overheat or burn the puppies. Keep a thermometer in the puppy area to monitor the temperature.

A simple 25-watt light bulb suspended over one end of a small box usually will supply sufficient heat. Keep a room thermometer under the light source to monitor the temperature. Heating pads need to be monitored closely if used, as the puppies may be too weakened to move away from them and become burned. If a heating pad must be used, wrap it in a thick towel or sheepskin to protect the puppies from burns.

For the first week, air temperature should be maintained at 90-95°F and a relative humidity of 55-65%. During the beginning of the second week, gradually reduce the temperature to 85°F. During the third week; 80°F. During the fourth week; 75°F. Beyond five weeks, decrease temperature to 70°F or the normal room temperature. Use common sense. If the puppies are piled on top of each other all the time, they are cold. If the puppies are spread far apart, they are too warm. If they lay next to each other, the temperature is fine.

Puppies that are hypothermic (low body temperature) should be warmed slowly over 2-3 hours to a normal neonate temperature of 97°F. A normal body temperature should be obtained before feeding these puppies.

Keep the moisture in a range comfortable for humans. In a homemade box area, a towel moistened with water and placed over the box will help add moisture. Never raise infants in a damp or moldy basement area. This type of stagnant dampness is

Recommended Caloric Intake	
Week	calories/pound/day
1	60-69
2	70-79
3	80-89
4+	90-100

usually cold and invites mildew and respiratory infections. Temperature control is more critical than humidity.

Puppies should be kept on a surface with good traction such as a blanket stretched taught and held firm under the sides of the whelping box.

Disease prevention

Many orphaned puppies are at a higher risk of developing infectious diseases such as distemper and parvovirus. This is especially true of puppies that were orphaned without having received any of their natural mother's colostrum. The colostrum, which is produced during the first 24 hours after giving birth is especially rich in disease-protecting antibodies. Colostrum contains the antibodies which when consumed by the puppies provides immunity against many diseases. Puppies that have never nursed have not received colostrum and do not have good immunity. Because of the possible lack of immunity, properly vaccinating the puppies is extremely important. Some veterinarians may recommend starting orphaned puppies with their first vaccinations at an earlier age.

Regular deworming of puppies is recommended by the American Association of Veterinary Parasitologists (AAVP), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Companion Animal Parasite Council (CAPC) as follows:.

- Initiate treatment at 2 weeks; repeat at 4, 6, and 8 weeks of age, and then put on a monthly heartworm preventive that also controls intestinal parasites. Using a year-round heartworm preventive/intestinal parasite combination product decreases the risk of parasites. If not using such a product, worm at 2, 4, 6, and 8 weeks of age and then monthly until 6 months of age.

*** Drs. Foster and Smith suggest that owners of newly acquired puppies should obtain the deworming history of their new pet and contact their veterinarian to determine if additional deworming is needed.**

Nurture and socialization

Puppies need mental and physical stimulation. If they have littermates, they will stimulate each other when moving. Snuggle with each puppy as you wake it to eat and for a time after eating. They need the nurturing to thrive.

It is important for the orphan puppy to have interaction with members of the household at 5-6 weeks of age. Remember, it is still a baby and must be handled with care, but you should start to introduce the pup to noises, grooming procedures, new people, and pets. [Early socialization](#) and enabling the puppy to feel secure in its own environment will help prevent many problems from arising in the future.



Conclusion

Does raising the orphan pup or litter seem like an enormous task? Do not worry, there are excellent books available for more specific information on orphan care and veterinary care in general. With a commitment of time and care, a little common sense, and some basic information, it can be a very positive experience. The happy, healthy young dog you helped raise will be a wonderful reward.