

Mum & Puppies Guide



Table of Contents

Supplies	1
Whelping box if pups are under 4 weeks of age	1
Feeding	2
Toileting	3
Socialization	4
Growth and Development	4
Keep neonates away from heaters or cold drafts	5

Supplies



Whelping box if pups are under 4 weeks of age

A crate put on its side, a large box with a small walkway cut out, a baby pool or baby gating an area off so the puppies stay close to the mother. The mother needs to be able to easily leave the area to eliminate away from her puppies and stretch her legs as necessary. Change bedding regularly and make sure the area is free of drafts. Keeping a very even temperature is very important.

Newspapers: Keep several layers in the bottom of the box - they will come in handy when the puppies start to roam around the room.

Water bowls: Should be heavy and difficult to tip. Should be stainless steel or porcelain/ceramic, NOT plastic, as plastic is difficult to disinfect.

Food bowls (one more than the number of dogs you are fostering): One is for the eat-at-will dry food, the other for canned food. You can use TV dinner trays, paper plates or whatever you have; any relatively flat plate or saucer will do. The larger the litter, the larger the plate should be so that no one gets crowded out.



Mum & Puppies Guide



- **Food:** AWL NSW will supply food.
- Plenty of **clean towels, blankets and toys.**
- **Baby gates and exercise pens:** For confining the puppies as needed



Feeding

Age 0-4 Weeks

Mum: The nursing mother dog should be offered plenty of food at all times – nursing puppies is incredibly hard work and her calorie intake needs to be much higher than a non-lactating dog. Most dog food packets/tins recommend food amounts for

lactating mother dogs on the label. Make sure she always has access to dry kibble and fresh water because lactating dogs also tend to drink more than non-nursing dogs.

Throughout the foster period, feed mum as much as she will eat! Puppies should nurse vigorously and compete for nipples. Newborns can nurse up to 45 minutes at a time. Be sure to watch puppies nursing at least once a day, if the mother will permit it. Check that everyone is nursing and that there isn't too much 'struggling' for position. One or more puppies that appear overly restless and/or constantly crying could indicate a problem with milk flow, quality or availability. When the mother reenters the box, there should be some fussing for only a few minutes before everyone has settled down to serious nursing. Puppies will sleep 90% of the time and eat the other 10%.

Age 4-5 Weeks

Puppies can usually drink and eat from a saucer by 4 weeks. Weaning should be done gradually. Introduce them to solid food by offering warmed canned food, mixed with a little water into gruel, in a shallow saucer. Begin by placing one puppy by the plate of canned food gruel, and if she starts eating, great! Her littermates will probably copy her and do the same. Some puppies may prefer to lick the gruel from your fingers, if this is the case; slowly lower your finger to the plate and hold it to the food. This way the puppies will learn to eat with their heads bent down. The puppies will walk in it, slide in it and make a huge mess! Be patient, sometimes it takes a few meals before they catch on...

Mum & Puppies Guide



Age 5-6 Weeks

Feed gruel 4 times a day. Thicken the gruel gradually by reducing the amount of water mixed with it. Introduce dry food and water. If you are fostering a litter with their mother, continue weaning. For reluctant eaters, try mixing Di-Vetelact (contact the Foster Care Officer if you're a Kemps Creek carer or the Welfare Officer if you are fostering for an AWL NSW branch) puppy formula into the gruel with a bit of water. The familiar formula taste and smell is often more appealing to the picky eaters than dog food. Once the puppy accepts the formula-based gruel gradually mix in dry puppy food until the puppy has been weaned like the other puppies.

Age 6-7 Weeks

By this age the puppies should be eating dry food well. Feed the puppies at least three meals daily. If one puppy appears food-possessive, use a second dish and leave plenty of food out so that everyone can eat at the same time. Although the puppies may not eat much at a single sitting, they usually like to eat at frequent intervals throughout the day.

Age 7-8 Weeks

Offer dry food 3-4 times a day. Leave down a bowl of water for them to eat and drink at will. If you have a litter with their mum, she should only be allowing brief nursing sessions, if any. Do not feed the puppies table scraps.

Age 8 weeks and over

Offer dry food 3 times a day. Leave down a bowl of water for them to drink at will.

Toileting

During the first 2-3 weeks of life puppies do not urinate and defecate on their own. This is done when the mother is cleaning them. As the mother stops taking care of their toileting needs but before the pups get the idea of toileting outside of their nest, there will be A LOT of cleaning up for you to take care of. Toilet training can begin at four weeks of age and can be done by using a pile of newspapers or training pads in a corner. After each feed, place the puppy on the papers, or outside, for him to go to the bathroom. Be patient! He may not remember to do this every time, or may forget where to find the papers, but he will learn quickly. Be sure to give the puppies lots of praise when they first start using their papers. It is a good idea to confine the puppies to a relatively small space, because the larger the area the puppies have to play in, the more likely they will forget where the papers are. Keep the papers clean and away from their food.

Mum & Puppies Guide



Socialization

Mum dogs generally appreciate NOT having to deal with any other animals while they are nursing their puppies. Protecting and nurturing her puppies is her number one priority and any other animal could be seen as a threat to their safety, no matter how friendly they are. Keep mum dogs isolated from other pets in the home until you are certain she is very comfortable and completely non-threatened. Keep in mind this may be the entire time she is in your home. Once the puppies are around 5-6 weeks and can tolerate time away from mum, you can begin to introduce them to other animals in your home.

Growth and Development

In the 2 first weeks of life, puppies are helpless and vulnerable. They are still developing basic reflexes, their hearing and vision is not yet fully developed, and they are unable to properly control their body temperatures. They should therefore be confined to the nursery area. Young puppies should be kept in a large box or kennel lined with a towel for easy cleaning. It is very important to keep the puppies warm, especially during the first 2-3 weeks of life. A heating pad or a warm water bottle can be ideal sources of heating. If you use a heating pad, make sure it only covers half or parts of the nursing area so that the neonates can move away from the heat if they need to, and also make sure it is set on "low" to avoid burns on their sensitive skin and that the electrical cord is out of reach of sharp little puppy teeth. The more puppies in your litter, the better they will be to keep warm by sleeping together in a heap. Small litters and singletons need more help keeping warm. Singletons will also often find comfort in a stuffed fluffy toy to snuggle up to.

Mum & Puppies Guide



Keep neonates away from heaters or cold drafts

As the puppies get older, from 4-5 weeks of age, they can be allowed to roam a larger area of your house, but they should still be closely supervised and kept in a secured area when not confined to their nursing area. Remember these puppies are very vulnerable to diseases such as canine parvovirus, and should be separated from other pets if possible, and only be allowed to interact with fully vaccinated, healthy dogs.

Age 0-2 weeks:

- Ear canals open between 5 and 8 days.
- Eyes will open between 8 and 14 days. They open gradually, usually starting to open from the nose outward. All puppies are born with blue eyes, and initially no pupils can be distinguished from the irises - the eyes will appear solid dark blue.
- Healthy puppies will be round and warm, with pink skin. If you pinch them gently, their skin should spring back.
- When you pick a puppy up, it should wiggle energetically and when you put it down near the mom it should crawl back to her.
- Healthy puppies seldom cry.

Age 2-3 weeks:

- If there is a mother, she will begin to spend larger periods of time out of the nest, though she will not go far from it.
- Puppies begin to crawl around day 18 and can stand by day 21.
- They will begin to play with each other, biting ears, tails and paws even before their teeth have come in.
- Their milk teeth are cut during this period.
- They learn to sit and touch objects with their paws.
- Puppies begin their socialization phase - they will be strongly influenced by the behaviour of their mother for the next six weeks. To further socialize puppies, increase the amount of handling, and get them used to human contact. It is important not to expose them to anything frightening; children may seem intimidating and should be supervised closely while visiting to ensure gentle handling.

Age 3-5 weeks

- Adult eye color will begin to appear, but may not reach final shade for another 9 to

Mum & Puppies Guide



12 weeks.

- Puppies begin to see well and their eyes begin to look and function like adult dogs' eyes. Puppies will start cleaning themselves, though their mother will continue to do most of the serious cleaning.
- If there is a mother present, she will usually begin weaning by discouraging her puppies from nursing; however, some dogs (particularly those with small litters) will allow nursing until the puppies are old enough for permanent homes. Some nursing activity is the canine equivalent of thumb-sucking, that is, for comfort only. Even if puppies appear to be nursing, they may not be getting all the nutrition they need from mum. Make sure they are eating food and gaining weight.
- Be sure that the puppies always have access to fresh water in a low, stable bowl.

Age 5-6 weeks

- At about five weeks, puppies can start to roam around the room, under supervision. The strongest, most curious puppy will figure out how to get out of the nest. The others will quickly follow.
- Be sure to take them to their puppy pads or outside after meals, during play sessions, and after naps. These are the usual times that puppies need to eliminate.
- Vaccinating and de-worming: Starting at 6 weeks old puppies should get vaccinated. De-worming is performed every 2-3 weeks starting as early as 2 weeks old depending on the medication.

Age 6-8 weeks

- By this time, you have "mini-dogs." They will wash themselves, play games with each other, their toys, and you, and many will come when you call them.
- This is a very entertaining time to have puppies – they play hard, sleep hard and are learning all about their world. Socialization is KEY during this period to make sure the puppies learn not to be threatened by new things.

Age 8 weeks

- Puppies should now be ready for vet treatments adoption if they are free of any symptoms of illness (runny nose, cough, diarrhoea, hair loss etc).

Credit: This guide was created by [Austin Animal Center](#) and has been adapted by AWL NSW as needed. It has been reproduced with permission.