

PUPPY CARE: The First 7 Weeks



Plan around
your pups as
they wriggle
toward
maturity.

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At birth, a puppy looks more like a gerbil than a dog, and is at least as helpless as a newborn human – perhaps more so. But within weeks, it will have surpassed any human baby in terms of mobility, social poise and even intelligence.

Week 1: Days 1 to 7

➔ As soon as they're born, puppies seek out the dam's teats, aided by her nudges. They do this using touch, then later scent and taste. As soon as a puppy's muzzle touches something, it turns toward it; as soon as something enters its mouth, the puppy suckles. The milk the puppies receive from the dam during the first day of their life contains valuable immunity against the same diseases she's immune to; without it, the pups will be more susceptible to disease.

Your job: If a puppy is not suckling on its own, express a drop of milk from the teat

and hold the pup's mouth to it. Monitor the puppy until it can hold onto the teat itself and suckle. Check to be sure no milk is bubbling out through the nostrils, which could indicate a cleft palate.

➔ The puppies' eyelids and ear canals are sealed, but puppies can detect light. Contrary to popular belief, puppies can also feel pain, and will cry or withdraw from painful stimuli shortly after birth.

Your job: If you plan to dock tails or remove dew claws, do so in the first three days. Even though the puppies can feel pain, they seem to get over it quickly at this age. Otherwise, you'll need to wait until the puppies are several months old and have the surgery performed under anesthesia.

➔ Each pup spends its days suckling and, mostly, sleeping. When suckling, it will jostle

At 1 week old, puppies develop rapidly, yet primarily sleep and eat.

from teat to teat. When sleeping, it will twitch and jerk. They will vocalize occasionally.

Your job: Don't ignore

a puppy that lies there limply or cries continuously. These are signs something's wrong.

Being born is tough. A puppy may lose a little weight the first day, but it shouldn't lose more than 10 percent of its birth weight, and it should start gaining weight by the second or third day.

Your job: Weigh each puppy every day. You may have to supplement the dam's milk supply. Check a puppy's suckling ability by sticking your finger in its mouth; test its rooting ability by lightly encircling its snout with your thumb and forefinger (it should push and wiggle). Ensure the puppies are not dehydrated, limp, chilled or overheated, and that their mucous membranes are pink.

A newborn puppy's body temperature is only 96.8 degrees Fahrenheit initially. It will rise to 98.6 degrees by week's end. A puppy can't raise or lower its body temperature using internal mechanisms like adults can, but it can crawl toward or away from heat sources to warm up or cool down. If a puppy becomes separated and chilled, it will cry and crawl toward any objects its muzzle encounters; if it's hot, it will crawl away from objects its muzzle encounters.

Your job: Because puppies cuddle with the dam to absorb her heat, you don't need to keep the room at hothouse temperatures as long as you keep the puppies out of drafts and with the dam. If she's away, or if it's chilly, add supplemental heat. Make sure the puppies can crawl away from the warmest area and that the dam does not become overheated. If the dam starts panting or if the puppies crawl away from her and have red skin, reduce the heat.

Puppies can crawl using a swimming-like movement, propelled mostly by the forelimbs.

Your job: Make sure the puppies don't become tangled in bedding or squashed by the dam. With giant breeds, this means constant supervision. With most other medium and large breeds, create a safety zone with a "pig-rail" – a rail or ledge that extends from the whelping-box walls creating a space that the puppy can crawl under.

The puppies' umbilical cords will dry up and fall off by 3 to 4 days of age.

Your job: Make sure the stumps aren't red or oozing, which could indicate infection.

The dam will stimulate the pups to urinate and defecate by licking their anuses and genitals.

Your job: On the first day, check that each puppy has an anal opening. Rub a warm, moist cloth on the genitals and anus to see if each pup is able to urinate and defecate. While you're at it, check for other anomalies, such as a cleft palate, hare lip and deformed feet and legs.

The demand on the dam's milk supply might become too much for her, especially with a large litter. Be prepared to supplement.

Even at this tender age, the puppies are capable of learning rudimentary things. They can approach a scent that's been paired with the dam's teats, avoid one that's been paired with a bitter substance or avoid a surface that has been hit with a puff of cold air.

Your job: Some studies suggest that handling neonatal puppies as little as three minutes a day may have long-lasting effects on their emotional reactivity later in life.

Week 2: Days 8 to 14

The puppies' lives still revolve around sleeping and nursing. They are nursing more vigorously now.

Your job: Use human fingernail scissors to trim the tips of the pups' toenails so they don't irritate the dam's tender teats.

By day 10, each puppy's weight should be approximately double its birth weight.

Your job: The demand on the dam's milk supply might become too much for her, especially with a large litter. Be prepared to supplement if the puppies nurse and cry, or fail to gain weight.

Puppies begin to open their eyes between days 10 and 15. The eyes are bluish, and will remain so for several weeks. Vision is far from mature, however.

Your job: Keep the lighting in the nursery somewhat dim.

During Week 2, the puppies' body temperatures increase to 99 degrees Fahrenheit. They are gaining some ability to control it, but it's still limited.

Your job: Reduce the temperature in the nursery by about 3 to 5 degrees. Raise it again if the puppies pile together, which they do for warmth. If a puppy cries incessantly, but ceases when you place it on a cold, moist towel, it's probably too warm.

The pups are becoming more mobile, raising their forequarters off the ground and using their hind legs more when crawling. Later in the week, the puppies will be able to crawl backwards and position their hind legs under them for support. As early as day 12,



Around 2 weeks old, puppies begin to open their eyes.

puppies may be standing on all fours and taking a few wobbly steps.

Your job: If the puppies are trying to walk, provide a smooth, non-slippery surface to practice on.

Week 3: Days 15 to 21

☞ The ear canals open, but hearing is not yet mature.

Your job: Relax. In breeds with pigment-related deafness, hearing is not noticeably impaired at first, so there's nothing to be gained by testing hearing this early.

☞ The puppies are standing and walking more steadily, with less head-swinging. They might even escape the whelping box, depending on the height of the sides.

Your job: Watch for "swimmers" – puppies that can't position their feet beneath their body. They will need extra help and support to walk, but usually turn out fine.

☞ The puppies' early attempts to lap gruel from a dish look like drunkards bobbing for apples, but the puppies are trying. They still prefer to nurse from the dam.

Your job: Provide liquefied puppy food in a

shallow dish so the pups can practice their eating skills. Be prepared to wash most of it off their feet and bodies. Although puppies can be weaned at this age, it's not preferable to do so at this time.

☞ The puppies are starting to urinate and defecate without the dam's stimulation. At first they have little control over when and where they relieve themselves, but by the end of the week they may be toddling away from the others to do so.

Your job: Provide an absorbent layer over the bedding so the pups don't lie in urine.

☞ The puppies are forming attachments with their siblings, making attempts to play by charging (and as often as not, missing) them, falling on top of them, or growling and biting. Long-lasting attachments can form at this age, depending on what the puppies are exposed to. For example, puppies reared exclusively with rabbits from 3 to 4 weeks of age until 16 weeks of age formed lifelong preferences for the company of this other species (RB Cairns and J Werboff. Behavioral development in the dog: An interspecific analysis. *Science*, 158: 1070-1072.).

Your job: If you have a singleton puppy, you may have to take the place of littermates by playing with it. If you plan to keep your dog with cats, now is a good time to introduce them. If a career as a livestock guardian is in the puppy's future, make plans to introduce the pup to sheep before 5 weeks of age so it will better identify with them and become protective of its flock.

☞ Before this time, the puppies preferred cuddling with objects that provide milk or warmth, even if they were hard. Now, the puppies prefer something soft.

Your job: This is a great excuse to hold the puppies on your lap.

Week 4: Days 22 to 28

☞ The puppies are eating more soft food, dividing dining between solid foods and the dam's milk. The canine teeth have started to erupt. As more teeth come in, it will make nursing uncomfortable for the dam.

Your job: Provide soft food and water, and allow the dam to take breaks from her ravenous brood. The puppies can be weaned now, or you can wait another week, depending on the dam's attitude toward nursing, and how well they are eating.

☞ The puppies' senses are nearly mature. They can run, and their play has become more coordinated and adult-like. They stalk, pounce, mount, bark, bite, growl, play with toys and fetch balls. This stage is the beginning of the most influential socialization period. The puppies wag their tails to both people and dogs, and approach when people enter the room. They recognize and prefer their own littermates to strange puppies.

Your job: Introduce the puppies to visitors and play with them using a variety of toys. The pups should be encouraged to fetch balls; dogs that never get this chance as young puppies often fail to ever develop an interest in fetching.

☞ The puppies are more interested in their surroundings and may wander off to explore.

Your job: Weather permitting, the pups should be allowed outdoor playtime. The outdoors is full of new and interesting forms of stimulation.

Week 5: Days 29 to 35

☞ The pups have the body temperature, vision and hearing of an adult. All 28 baby teeth have erupted. Puppies have more control over facial muscles and can make more expressions.



When the puppies reach 4 weeks of age, they are ready to explore the outdoors.



Keep puppies safe as they play outdoors, removing hazards as necessary.

Your job: Protect your flesh from barracuda puppy teeth.

➤ The puppies' play has become more aggressive, full of nipping and wrestling.

Your job: Some puppies may bully their littermates to the extent that you will need to step in and separate them. Being consistently bullied, or consistently bullying another, can become a lifelong habit. If the puppy bites you too aggressively, say "No!" and stop the game for several minutes. This simulates how littermates yelp and then refuse to play when a puppy gets too rough.

➤ At this age, the puppies are extremely sociable and fearless, but they need to learn to spend time alone.

Your job: Gradually get them used to spending short periods – up to 20 minutes or so – alone and crated.

Week 6: Days 36 to 42

➤ The puppies are becoming more independent, and if given the chance, will get into mischief. They play roughly, often eliciting yelps from their littermates. The dam is much more likely to reprimand puppies for overly rough play with her.

Your job: Make sure each puppy has play time with its littermates. Puppies that are separated from their littermates too early – before 7 weeks of age – often fail to develop proper bite inhibition, and don't learn appropriate dog-to-dog interactions as adults.

Week 7: Days 43 to 49

➤ By Week 7, male puppies' testicles have descended into the scrotum, but are tiny.

Your job: If they're not clearly visible, hold the pup on his back and carefully stroke from the base of the penis toward the scrotum. You should be able to feel a tiny bump on each side, near the scrotum. There's still hope if the testicles haven't descended, testicles often descend much later in life. If they don't descend, neutering will be more difficult.



Rough play between puppies begins at 5 to 6 weeks.

➤ This week is important for house-training. The type of surface puppies eliminate on between now and 9 weeks old influences what they will prefer for the rest of their lives.

Your job: Begin housetraining, using the same surface you want the dogs to use as adults. If it's grass, bring in some sod or take them outdoors. If it's more than one surface, give them a chance on both grass and concrete, for example.

➤ The puppies' willingness to approach and investigate novel objects comes to a peak this week, but they are also developing a slight fear response.

Your job: The pups are too young to visit other dogs or places frequented by dogs until they've received their vaccinations, but you can still expose them to new people and experiences around the house. Let them grow used to walking on different surfaces, overcoming obstacles, hearing all sorts of noises and meeting a variety of people.

They grow up so fast!

Now it's time to prepare the pups for their new homes – if they're leaving. Many behaviorists believe that 7 or 8 weeks is the optimal time to place puppies in their new homes.

How did time go by so fast? They've gone from gerbilsque blobs to little monsters in just seven weeks. But then, those are dog weeks for you. **95**

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