



**Lilydale Clinic**  
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## CARE OF YOUR LITTER

### POSTPARTUM CARE

In order to have healthy new born puppies, both sire and dam must be in good physical condition. This will prevent the passing along of any diseases or parasites to the pups. In addition, a bitch who is infected with worms or poorly vaccinated before mating, sick, over-weight or fed a non-nutritious diet will not have the strength and stamina necessary to support puppies during pregnancy, whelping and nursing.

When the birth appears to have been completed and the bitch and pups have had several hours together, they should be checked by your vet to ensure that the bitch has no more pups or afterbirths inside her uterus. The pups should also be checked over to see they have no congenital defects, such as cleft palate, overshot or undershot jaw, which may necessitate euthanasia. Also check they have a patent anus.

The bitch should be checked to ensure she has a sufficient number of functional nipples to feed her litter adequately. A normal bitch can rear 10 puppies with ease, and many bitches of the larger breeds can rear litters in excess of this number. Ten nipples does not necessarily mean the bitch can only raise 10 puppies. Also supplementary feeding should only be done if the need arises; e.g. dehydrated, fading puppies from lack of nourishment. It should not be done as a matter of course if the puppies are progressing normally.

Mortality rates in puppies are estimated to be as high as 20 – 30 % in the first five weeks of life. The highest losses occur in the first week.

It is best to avoid supplementing the pups early in life, as this tends to give them gastro-intestinal upsets. If it is unavoidable, then the correct formulas should be used and we recommend Biolac as the best to use in this situation as it has been formulated to best resemble the bitch's milk. A lot of formulas on the market are for across the board orphaned animals, e.g. marsupials etc.

It is important to allow the puppies to suckle undisturbed for the first six – twelve hours, as it is during this period that they acquire their antibodies against disease from the mother's first milk or colostrum. Pups deprived of this milk have a much greater risk of dying in the first six to twelve weeks of life.

Newborn puppies are unable to maintain their own body temperature. For this reason they are dependent on either the mother or artificial forms of heating. The whelping and rearing area should be kept at a constant temperature of 26°C for the first weeks. Temperature fluctuations are just as detrimental to the puppies well-being as low temperatures.

The puppies should be weighed on a regular daily basis and recorded. Weight gain is the single most important criteria of how a puppy is doing. A healthy pup should just about double its birth weight by the time it is 7 – 10 days old. It should be noted that pups can lose weight in the first 24 hours.

The signs to look for if a puppy is not doing as well as it should be are:

- Constant crying
- Not enough strength to suckle
- Dehydration by using the pinch test
- Weight loss

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If this situation arises then the puppy or puppies will need to have supplementary feeding either until they regain their strength to suckle or can be weaned.

There are various methods to feed puppies. If they are strong enough to suckle then a bottle and teat is best. If they are weak and unable to suckle then emergency treatment is necessary and they should be tube fed. They should be returned to the bitch or bottle fed as soon as they are able to suckle.

Tube feeding is an especially good method for very young pups as they don't have a well-developed gag reflex. A soft, flexible feeding tube should be pre-measured. Place it along the outside of the pup's body from the tip of the mouth to just in front of the last rib; mark this length. Insert the tube into the pup's mouth and gently push down into the stomach up to the marked spot. If the tube hags up anywhere, withdraw it and gently restart it. Attach a syringe containing a pre-measured amount of formula to the free end of the tube, and administer it gently and slowly.

Common sense always prevails as to amounts to feed and how often. Try to imagine how big the puppies stomach would be. Puppies up to three weeks of age should receive six feeds daily, but this is only a rough guide. Feeds at 3 days would be of the order of 3 – 5 mls for a puppy weighing around 200g. The puppy should be receiving 15% of bodyweight daily. Therefore a 200g puppy should receive 30mls daily divided into 6 feeds. This should be done up to 2 – 3 weeks, after which weaning can take place and puppy should be able to lap.

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to call us at the clinic 9739 5244