



Southside Animal Hospital

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Neonatal Care of Puppies and Kittens

Hand-raising young puppies and kittens can be a daunting task. It requires careful attention and many hours, including night hours, to ensure their survival. It is equally rewarding, however, to save the life of an orphaned puppy or kitten. There are several things that must be done and monitored to make this process successful.

Temperature Regulation

Puppies and kittens have very little body fat to retain heat and are unable to produce enough heat at birth to maintain body temperature. They must have an external source of heat. Having proper temperature aides in digestion, fighting infection, and limits crying. Place the neonates in a box. Place a towel on the bottom of the box, followed by a heating pad. Place several more towels on top of the heating pad. Then, place the neonates on the towels, and cover the top of the box. **If the neonates lay directly on the heating pad they will get burned.** Also make sure this is an undamaged heating pad to prevent the likelihood of a fire. Depending on the age of the puppies or kittens, the box needs to be kept at different temperatures. You can place a thermometer in the box to check the temperature.



Week 1	85 - 90°F
Week 2	80°F
Week 3	80°F
Week 4	80°F
Week 5	70°F

Proper Feeding

As with all animals, proper nutrition is required to stay healthy. First, never feed the neonate if it is cold. If it is cold, the stomach and intestines do not transport food properly and the milk may spoil in the stomach. If the neonate is cold, warm it up first to an appropriate temperature and then feed it.

Second, always feed the neonate in a natural position. Do not feed them on their back like a baby. This increases the chance of getting fluid in the lungs. Feed them laying on their stomach and stretching upward toward the bottle. You can feed them with a nursing bottle or syringe. Some neonates do better with one or the other. If you buy a nursing bottle, you will need to make several small holes in the nipple with a small straight pin or safety pin.



Third, buy a quality puppy or kitten milk replacer. Esbilac, KMR, and Nuturall are quality

brands. They come in liquid or powder. If you buy the powder be sure to mix it properly or it can cause diarrhea.

Fourth, feed the proper amount. You need to weigh the neonates on a small scale to obtain an accurate weight. The container of the milk replacer will tell you the amount to feed. The total daily amount should be divided over several feedings in the day according to the chart below.

Week 1	Feed every 3 hours - 8 feedings
Week 2	Feed every 4 hours - 6 feedings
Week 3	Feed every 6 hours - 4 feedings
Week 4	Start feeding moistened puppy or kitten food and supplement milk as needed.
Week 5	Should be eating puppy food well and supplement milk as needed.

Bathroom Habits

Puppies and kittens are not able to urinate and defecate without help for the first few weeks of their lives. They need help early on. After each feeding, you need to take a warm, damp cloth and gently wipe the genitals of the puppy or kitten. This stimulates them to urinate and defecate. They should urinate after most every feeding and defecate every 2 or 3 feedings. The stool is often yellow in color.

Monitoring Weight Gain

One of the best indicators of the health of the neonate is regular gaining of weight. If they are not gaining properly, there may be problems with the feeding regimen or with the neonate itself. Puppies should gain 5 to 10% of their body weight per day. Kittens should gain 10 -15 grams per day.

Signs of Problems

There are several signs to look for if your puppy or kitten is in trouble. Excessive **crying** is the first sign to look for. They will do this if they are cold, hungry, painful, or have a bacterial infection. If your neonate is **not defecating**, this can indicate constipation. Make sure you are stimulating him properly. If your neonate is **cold**, this can lead to a variety of problems and you need to warm him up. If you see **diarrhea**, make sure that the milk is properly mixed. If they are 3 weeks or older a stool sample may need to be checked for parasites. A **weak nursing reflex** is often the sign of some of the above issues or other causes. If the neonate is **not urinating**, this often indicates he is dehydrated and needs additional fluids.

When do I start vaccinations and deworming?

You should provide your first dewormings at 2 weeks of age and repeat this at 4, 6, 8, and 10 weeks of age. All puppies and kittens have worms. Vaccinations for puppies begin at 6 weeks of age, and kittens begin at 9 weeks of age.

