

Nursing Care for Newborn Puppies and Kittens

Shelter

Keep the puppies or kittens in a box with high sides. Cover the bottom of the box with a padded flooring like a towel or carpeting. Do not use materials that can become slippery when wet, such as a newspaper.

Warmth

Newborn puppies and kittens cannot regulate their own body temperature and can become hypothermic very quickly. You will have to provide a heat source for the first few weeks. Acceptable heat sources include warm water bottles, a heating pad, or a heat lamp. A heating pad or a lamp must always be on the low setting. Higher settings can result in severe burns or death. Never cover the entire floor of the box with a heating pad. An overheated newborn must be able to get away from the heat source. A normal rectal temperature should be between 97-100 degrees Fahrenheit.

Feeding

Until the newborn is able to start eating solid food (about 3-4 weeks) it will need to be bottle fed a replacement formula. There are commercially made formulas available that closely compare to the mother's milk and meet the nutritional requirements for the puppy or kitten.

Use a bottle specifically designed for puppies and kittens or a medicine dropper to administer the formula. If the hole in the bottle is the right size then you should be able to turn the bottle upside down and see milk slowly drip from the nipple with just a gentle squeeze. If milk flows from the bottle without squeezing it, the hole is too large. If you have to squeeze firmly on the bottle to get milk to flow, the hole is too small. The hole can be enlarged by piercing it with tip of a hot needle.

Warm the formula to 100 degrees Fahrenheit or to a temperature close to the newborn's temperature. Feed the puppy or kitten on its stomach and hold the bottle so it does not ingest air. Never squeeze the milk out of the bottle when it is in the newborn's mouth or they may aspirate the formula into the lungs. Never feed a chilled newborn or a newborn that does not have a strong suckling reflex. Follow the directions on the commercial formula packaging for feeding amounts. They often require you to weigh the newborn on a gram scale. Newborn puppies and kittens need to be fed every 2-3 hours. If the newborn is not able to be bottle fed, contact a veterinarian about potentially tube feeding the puppy or kitten.

Eliminations

After feeding, it is important to stimulate the newborn to urinate and defecate. Use a moistened cotton ball or tissue and swab the anal region until elimination occurs. Do this after each feeding until 3 weeks

of age.