

# Information on Care of the Neonate and Weaning



## Care of the Neonate

The initial steps post parturition (birth) is to initially provide a warm environment and ensure that the puppies or kittens are able to suckle from their mother. Hypothermia is a major cause of neonatal fatalities so their environmental temperature is vital. A recommended temperature would be 25-30°C for the first few days, reduced to 22°C thereafter as long as they are in a draught proof area.

Hand rearing of neonates is sometimes necessary if their mother has become ill or is unable to nurse them due to another reason. It is essential that neonates receive colostrum from their mum during the first few hours after birth ensuring they are provided with an adequate uptake of maternal immunoglobulins. After the initial 24 hours it is possible to commence the use of supplementary feeding which are available from your veterinary practice.

Neonates will normally feed every 2-4 hours for the first five days of their lives, once they are over five days old you are then able to reduce their feeding regime to once every 4 hours. Puppies and kittens generally receive all of their nutritional requirements and needs by three weeks of age. At this stage small boluses of meat can be introduced to the litter on a finger allowing a controlled and steady introduction and beginning of the weaning process.

## Weaning Kittens

A challenge for some kittens is that they have a hard time switching to an eating position where their head is down. The solution to this problem is to put some food on your finger and put it slightly above their head level for them to eat. Gradually bring the finger down until it is at the same level as a food bowl. Soon you should be able to get them to eat from a bowl of the same food placed in front of them.

You must gradually introduce solid food into their diet. Mixing the soft meaty food with warm water or a milk substitute at first will help them chew and digest the food easily. The mushy consistency is closer to the feel of a mother's milk, and makes the transition smoother for the litter. As they get used to the new food, put less and less liquid in it until you don't have to put anything in the food at all to get them to eat it. Rest assured kittens will quickly give up the milk once they realise how tasty their new food can be.

It is important to remember that it is not recommended you give your kitten, or any cat cow's milk. Cow's milk does not contain the same nutrients present in a cat's mother's milk. Cats lack the enzymes needed to process and digest cow's milk. It will most likely give them stomach trouble and in some cases diarrhoea. When weaning kittens you do not want to create problems with their digestive system.

Once weaned, cats must be fed a balanced diet rich in proteins, vitamins, and calories often referred to as a **complete** diet.

## Weaning Puppies

At two weeks of age, puppies should be alert and trying to stand. At three weeks, they generally try to climb out of their boxes and by four weeks all of the puppies should be able to walk, run, and play.

Puppies should begin eating solid food at about three and a half to four and a half weeks of age. At his age and to begin the weaning process a milk replacer should be placed in a flat saucer. You should then place your finger into the formula and up towards the puppy's mouth encouraging them to lick the milk off, repeat this process two to three times a day until they begin to lap independently, this can take one to five days. The next stages are to place a complete puppy food into the milk substitute and encourage the puppies to explore and taste the new food. As the puppies lap the milk, they will also ingest the food. The amount of milk should be decreased daily until they are eating a wet or dry food with little or no moisture added; this should occur by four to six weeks of age.

As soon as they are able to eat it is worthwhile weaning them on to one of the complete puppy foods of which there are many to choose from but make an appointment at your local veterinary practice and they will be able to advise you.



01793 522483