



Common Puppy Problems

IN THE FIRST 10 DAYS

by Dr Karen Hedberg BVSc



Dewclaw Removal

Some breeds have all their dewclaws removed, however, more commonly it is only the hind dewclaws that are removed, except in the Pyrenean Mountain dog and the Briard, where rear double dewclaws are hallmark features of their breeds and must remain intact. The dewclaws are generally removed when the

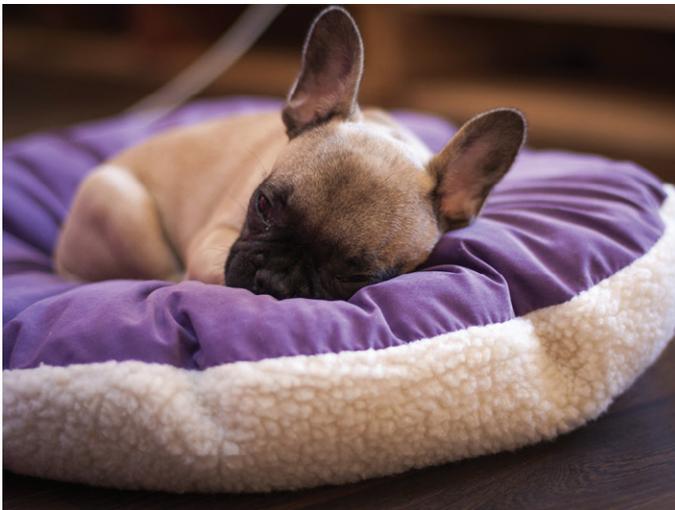
puppies are 3-4 days of age. Puppies that are in any way sickly, very small or weedy, should wait for a few days

Dewclaws, particularly on the hind legs can be a real problem in older dogs, especially with the hairy breeds. The nails can grow very long and actually grow around and into the back of the nail bed, creating abscesses and other problems. Dewclaws often get caught and torn. Most breeds have the rear dewclaws removed and some also have the front dewclaws removed. This is a good idea in coated breeds, especially if they are clipped, as the dewclaws can get cut while they are being trimmed.

Larger hind dewclaws are also stitched. Small dew claws and front dewclaws are usually cauterised by various means, often by using potassium permanganate crystals.

Puppy 'Nightmares'

Newborn puppies have muscle twitching episodes while they are sleeping. This is quite a normal event and indicates 'active sleep'. A puppy will spend 80-90% of its time during the first 10 days asleep and this muscle twitching is a way of ensuring that the muscle tone is retained. The twitching effect will gradually disappear after a few weeks. As the puppy gradually spends more and more time awake, getting increasingly mobile, so the need for this 'active sleep' decreases.



Staph Infections

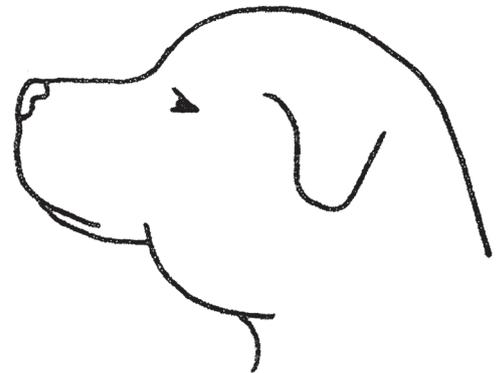
These are fairly common so be aware!

1. Skin Infections

This condition appears as thickened and/or scabby patches of skin. Initially, there may only be one puppy affected, but the infection can be spread by the bitch to the other puppies by licking. Staph skin infection can usually be controlled by topical application of something to dry out the skin which tastes horrible enough to stop the bitch licking it. Avoid heavy ointments and creams. Gentian violet or Betadine* is very good, as are antibiotic powder sprays. If there are large areas affected, antibiotics may have to be used. This type of infection is more commonly seen in humid conditions. Keep the lesions as dry as possible.

2. Puppy Strangles

Puppy strangles is an infection that can affect one or two puppies in a litter, recognised by large 'mumps' under the jaw. These are abscesses of the lymph nodes and can appear fairly rapidly, almost overnight. The lumps are hot and painful and these abscesses need to be lanced by your vet as soon as possible, as the toxins from the infection and the pressure around the throat can make the puppies deteriorate fairly rapidly. If they are not lanced, the skin over the abscess may die, leaving a nasty hole. This condition is usually seen at around 10-28 days but can be seen earlier. Antibiotics are given afterwards.

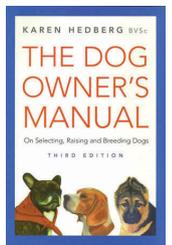


3. Infected Eyes – require immediate treatment!

Occasionally, at the time that the eyes are due to open (10-14 days), a puppy may develop what appears to be a grossly swollen eye (can be as early as 7 days). The puppy should be taken to your vet **immediately** to have the eye opened. The lids are washed and gently teased apart at the inner corner where the eye normally opens first and the purulent material released. The eye should be bathed with damp cotton wool and flushed out thoroughly. An antibiotic ointment used several times a day for 3-4 days. Generally systemic antibiotics are used as well (eg. Clavulox* drops) as this eye infection can be indicative of generalised systemic infection.

Delaying too long in treating these infected eyes can result in permanent damage to the cornea and even loss of vision.

An extract from **The Dog Owners Manual** by Dr Karen Hedberg BVSc
Available for purchase from Dogs NSW for \$63.60 + p/h

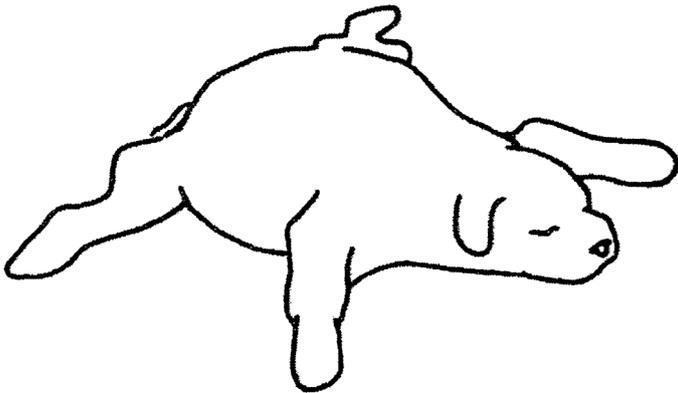


Swimmers

These are a “production problem”.

Occasionally you may see a ‘swimmer’. This means that the puppy will look flat from the top of the back to the chest. It will move around in a fashion similar to a child first learning to swim. The rib cage will feel flattened out and the puppy is usually unable to stand, particularly with the hind legs, and has difficulty in moving around the box. They are usually first noticed because they cannot readily move around the box.

Age Seen - Swimmers are seen from as early as 4-6 days up to three weeks of age.



Causes:-

1. Puppies become overheated due either to excessive outside temperatures such as a hot summer day with inadequate cooling, or in winter from excessive heating, especially from underneath, with heated whelping boxes being left on the highest heat. It is more commonly seen in summer months.
2. Occasionally a fat puppy will not move around the box adequately and tends to ‘melt’ into the swimmer state due to its weight and laziness. This is more commonly seen in very small litters where there can be very rapid weight gain due to over feeding by the reduced number of puppies.

Very young puppies are essentially very soft boned, as most of the bones are still cartilage at this stage. Excessive heat will cause the puppies to lie flat in an attempt to cool down, as the greatest cooling will occur on the stomach. Too much or too rapid a weight gain and too little movement will likewise cause the same situation through prolonged lying on the chest. The longer the puppies lie in this posture the flatter they become.

Treatment of swimmers

Treatment of swimmers involves both correcting the causes of the problem and physiotherapy.

The causes are simply remedied - arrange adequate cooling in summer and do not ‘over-cook’ puppies with excessive heat in winter. Make sure there is a mixture of surfaces so that it is difficult for the puppy to lie flat on its stomach. To do this, put scrunched up newspaper underneath the blanket or sheet. Placing a bean bag under the puppies is very effective way to help prevent the problem in the first place. This is particularly good in winter as the air between the beans retains the heat of the box very evenly. Bean bags can help to correct the problem of swimmers once you have the condition present, as the puppies cannot lie flat on the beans and have to exercise hard to move around. In summer, a bean bag may be too hot, so you may have to rely on rough uneven surfaces.

Flat puppies or swimmers need to be exercised. Physiotherapy for affected puppies involves turning the puppy on its back, moving the legs together in a bicycling action, up and down in line with the body. Also bring the legs in medially so as to stretch the muscle over the shoulder and back. Massage the chest between your hands into a more normal shape - gently.

If you can do this several times a day, most puppies, especially if caught early enough, will respond very quickly and will return to normal within 7-10 days. The more severely affected puppy that has been detected late may never entirely return to normal. These puppies may have a triangular chest which is flattened over the base of the rib cage – which in no way affects their eventual quality of life.

Anabolic steroids may be necessary to assist badly affected puppies and sometimes small splints may be needed for the pasterns (wrist). Splints should be left on for 2-3 days maximum, as that is usually quite sufficient at this age. If left too long, the affected tendons will stretch the wrong way. Occasionally the hind legs have to be taped together, rather like a set of horse hobbles, to keep them reasonably close together and stop the puppy doing the splits all the time.

See your vet and between the two of you, work out a schedule of physiotherapy. This needs to be done 3-4 times daily for at least five minutes at a time. Correct the environment and make fat puppies exercise. A good way to do this is to put the puppy in the farthest corner of the box away from its mother every time you go past, making the puppy exercise to get back. This also has the advantage of slightly reducing the puppy’s food intake.

Nearly all swimmer puppies can be completely corrected provided that the problem is noticed early enough, the problems creating the condition are corrected and the puppies are given plenty of physiotherapy.