



VET CHAT

# Orphan Puppies & Supplementary Feeding

Extract from The Dog Owner's Manual  
by Dr Karen Hedberg BVSc



Supplementary feeding is necessary where there are big litters, poor mothers, bitches with very little milk or infected milk, orphans, weedy puppies and/or those that fail to gain weight sufficiently. Supplements should always be fed at body temperature, i.e. it should be warm on your wrist (approximately 36°-38°C).

Supplementation should start as soon as the need arises. The sooner it starts the better and the quicker will be the result. Initial supplementation may need to be half hourly if the puppy is very weak. As the puppy improves, the feeds can be further apart. If dehydrated the puppy may need subcutaneous saline and glucose solutions.

## Feeding Orphaned Puppies (Hand Rearing)

### Time between feeds

Start feeding every two hours for the first 3-4 days, gradually increasing the time between feeds to every three hours and four hours by 4-5 days. By 8-10 days, feeds should be every 4-6 hours, and at 10-14 days, you may be able to start feeding mushy solids. Very small breeds require more frequent feeding and will require to be bottled for longer - up to 3 weeks. Basically, if the puppies are hungry - they will scream for food when they want it.

### Teats

The teats used vary considerably, but human baby teats and bottles can be used. For the smaller breeds, there are various types of pet nursers available. One of the better type of teat shapes is where the teat is slightly flexible, in and out of the top of the bottle, similar to the teats of the bitch. Alternatively, use the human premature baby teats size 0-3 months.

### Hygiene

Hygiene is most important when handfeeding puppies. Make sure all bottles and teats are kept very clean. Milk that is made up and not used must be stored in the refrigerator.

### Heating the milk

Preferably heat the milk in the bottle which is then placed in a jug of hot water to gently warm up. Do not over heat - the milk should be lukewarm on the back of your hand. Care should be taken with microwaving milk as it can be very quickly over heated and repeated heating will damage the milk and is not

desired. If you have a large litter to supplement I usually have two bottles going, one sitting in the jug and one being used.

## Feeding the Puppies

A helpful hint: **always urinate the puppy**, before feeding it so that it will be able to take in more food. To make the puppy urinate, gently rub a damp tissue around the appropriate outlet and the puppy will perform. Puppies should be made to defecate **after** every second feed (i.e. approximately 4 hourly). To make the puppy defecate, gently roll the puppy between your hands for half a minute and then, with a piece of wet cotton wool, gently rub around the anus while gently holding the puppy around the abdomen with your other hand. If the puppy is not defecating after three feeds you may need to give the puppy a small enema and some laxative orally.

The amount of milk supplement given in a single feed varies tremendously according to the size of breed and size of the puppy. Generally, a puppy is full when the stomach feels firm. To check, gently feel the stomach just behind the ribs, if it is still fairly empty try and give the puppy more. Some puppies will gobble into the food so greedily that they may start to choke. Check the flow on the teat as the holes may be too big; but if not, then accept the fact that some puppies are gluttons and keep them in check by giving them half a feed, feeding the others and then giving the greedy one some more. Check that the teat is not on the bottle too tight - this can restrict the flow of milk.



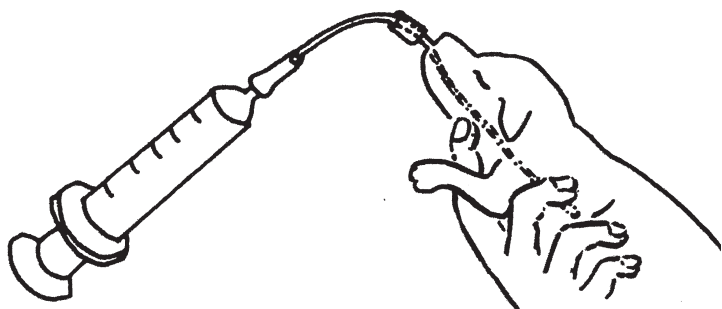
Some puppies will overfeed in one feed and then not take much the next feed. This is all right as long as there is a drop in consumption in one feed only. Puppies should take a regular amount that is steadily increased as they get bigger and as the feeds are less frequent.

### Holding the puppy to bottle feed

Gently hold the puppy with one hand and the bottle forwards and slightly tilted upwards from the puppy's mouth with the other hand. Never hold the bottle at too steep an angle to the puppy's neck.

### Tube Feeding

This is a method of feeding newborn puppies that are reluctant or are too weak to suck from a bottle. It can be a fast way of feeding orphan puppies, but it does have definite problems. You need to be fairly experienced to tube feed successfully. The vagus nerve which helps control swallowing and movement along the oesophagus, does not develop fully until around 10-14 days. Regurgitation or inhalation into the lungs sometimes happens, and can occur with puppies that are chilled.



I would only suggest tube feeding for a puppy that is extremely flaccid and is unwilling to suckle. Give small amounts of fluid frequently until the puppy picks up, and then return it to the bitch or bottle. Fluids that are tube fed must be at body temperature. If too cold, they could cause stomach upsets or gripes.

The best tubes to use are human neonatal feeding tubes or Jackson Tom Cat Catheters – both have a syringe attachment on one end.

When tube feeding, you should place a marker on the tube at the spot that is roughly equal to the distance from the nose to the end of the ribs. When inserting the tube, gently extend the head forwards and slightly upwards and slide the tube in gently down the left hand side of the puppy's throat (the oesophagus runs down the left side of the throat).

If there is any resistance or coughing, remove the tube immediately and start again. Once into the stomach, insert a small amount of fluid at a time. If there is any resistance or signs of milk gurgling out the nose, stop and remove the tube immediately.

*Tube feeding should be done slowly and gently.*  
**Do not overfeed!**

Personally, I feel that bottle feeding a sick or orphan puppy is the best and safest way. With bottle feeding, there is normal salivation and stimulation of sucking and swallowing. Puppies rarely take more than they need from the bottle unless they are really greedy.

### Supplementary Products for Hand Raising Puppies

There are various commercial supplements readily available which are very good, but you must use only those that are specially formulated for use in dogs.

1. I prefer freshly made up puppy formulas, which are well tolerated. It can be used with puppies that have loose motions and you can wean puppies onto it.
2. Nutrigel® is a highly concentrated energy supplement. It is very useful for the smaller, weak puppy. Nutrigel® can keep older puppies going, even if they will eat nothing else. Squeeze out 1-2 cm on the roof of the mouth 3-4 times daily. It puts weight on sickly puppies and they really like it, often licking it direct from the tube. Nutrigel® is also useful for older puppies if they are off their food for any reason, or refusing to eat.
3. Natural yoghurt and/or acidophilus bacteria – stabilises the gut bacteria. When the puppies have loose motions, give the puppies yoghurt. The acidophilus replaces the gut bacteria that are responsible for the digestion of milk.

### Homemade Puppy Milk Substitute

(\*You must only use long life milk or a canned milk that is properly reconstituted.

**Do not use pasteurised milk as it can upset newborn puppies' gut bacteria.)**

- 10 oz long life Goats milk
- 1 cup full cream whole milk yoghurt (Jalna Turquoise label)
- 1 egg yolk
- 1 teaspoon corn syrup

Mix in a blender or whisk, strain and refrigerate. Change every 3-4 days.

Optional - can add 1-2 drops Pentavite® (multivitamin drops) to the whole mix.





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4. Laxatives and preventing gas production - Laxagel®, Tympanyl® and gripe water are excellent, both as a treatment and preventative. Like human babies, puppies can occasionally get a gas colic, a few drops of Tympanyl® can prevent and/or treat this. Only use if needed and then only every 4 hours. Tympanyl® is an oil and peppermint product used with cattle to prevent bloat.

### Constipation in Newborn puppies

This can be a very real problem with *orphan puppies* and with *puppies of bitches that are too gentle* in their care of the puppies. If there is insufficient stimulation of the intestines, the faeces do not move along the intestines as quickly as normal. Large, lazy, fat puppies are also more prone to constipation, as they do not move around as much as their thinner litter mates.

Active puppies and those with good mothers, who are just a shade rough with their puppies, very rarely, if ever, have any trouble with constipation. Once puppies are up and on their feet, constipation rarely occurs.

#### Symptoms

The signs of constipation are reluctance to drink (or eat), moaning and groaning, and a very hard and enlarged abdomen. Most constipated puppies will have bouts of straining around a rigid abdomen.

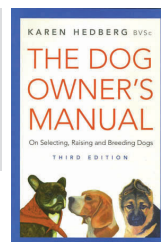
#### Treatment

Give them plenty of stimulation to the abdomen. Do this by picking them up between your hands and rolling them (rather like a rolling pin). Then gently rub the abdomen from the top right to bottom left, (the colon goes from the puppy's top right to left and then down the left side). Use wet cotton wool to stimulate the anus. If all this does not work, you may have to give the puppy a lukewarm, soapy enema.

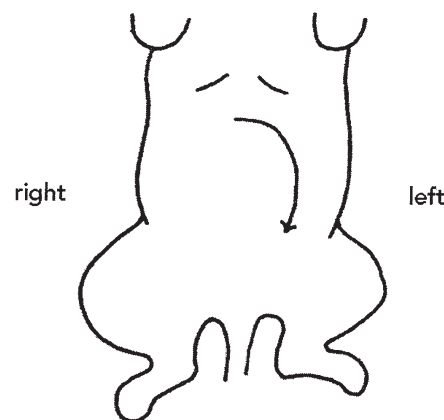
**Enemas must be given very gently and only with lukewarm soapy water.** Do not use detergent as it irritates the gut. If the soapy water is too hot or too cold, the puppy will become distressed. Small amounts (2-3 mls) are squirted up the rectum with a syringe with the tip (1/2 cm) pushed through the anal opening. The puppy should then be GENTLY

An extract from **The Dog Owners Manual** by Dr Karen Hedberg BVSc

Available for purchase from Dogs NSW for \$63.60 + p/h



massaged, then stimulate the rectum (as seen to the right) and small amounts of faeces will start popping out. You can repeat this with another small flush of the soapy water.



Treatment should only continue for 3-4 minutes and then the puppy should be rested. If you overdo it, you stress the puppy. It is already under considerable discomfort with a blocked bowel, without the added stress of an enema.

After giving the puppy an enema, leave it alone for 1-2 hours before repeating any treatment. Usually after 3-4 treatments the puppy will have recovered. Concurrent small doses of oil (several drops) or a mild laxative (Tympanyl®, Laxagel®) given orally can help shift the problem – but remember it can take up to 12 hours to get from the front to the back end. If you cannot clear the blockage within 3-4 hours, see your vet.

#### Prevention

Prevent a recurrence of constipation by giving a small amount of oil and/or some other laxative in the diet on a regular daily basis. This is particularly important after a diet change of any sort, no matter how mild a change! Laxagel® is very good for preventing this sort of problem. Tympanyl® is a mild laxative and prevents gas production or Gripe Water: both are good products.

It is important that puppies that are supplement fed should be well stimulated after each feed. This will assist the movement of faeces along the intestinal tract.

By the time puppies are up and moving around the box they are much less likely to become constipated.