

Post-Cesarean Section Neonatal Care

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Dams recovering from post-caesarian section anesthesia may be clumsy or even aggressive and should not be left unattended with their puppies for 24-36 hours post-surgery. A basic knowledge of proper husbandry is critical since it will be up to the owner/breeder to provide the puppies with warmth and food, and to assist the puppies with eliminating regularly. A watchful eye and close monitoring of the puppies is crucial to their survival. With that in mind, it is also important to allow the dam enough time to interact and bond with her puppies during this critical time. A normal puppy has pink mucous membranes, will squirm and vocalize when handled and will suckle readily and sleep quietly.

Until puppies are four weeks old they are unable to regulate their own body temperature, therefore their environment must be warm enough for them to maintain a body temperature of at least 97 degrees. An overhead infrared heat lamp set to maintain an environment temperature between 84-89 degrees works best since heating pads may become too hot and burn puppies. Normal rectal temperature for a neonate puppy is between 95-99 degrees. Keeping the lamp over part of the whelping box allows the dam space to move away from it if she is too warm.

Puppies should be placed in with the dam every 1-2 hours to nurse under strict supervision. Test a nipple to make sure it is producing milk before placing a puppy on it to nurse, and then ensure that the puppy is nursing by gently attempting to pull the puppy off the nipple. Be sure each puppy nurses effectively by weighing each puppy before and after each nursing session. All puppies weights should be recorded twice daily for the first week.

Puppies lack the ability to eliminate on their own until three weeks of age and must be stimulated to urinate and defecate. If the dam is not doing so, after each nursing session a cotton ball with a small amount of mineral oil can be used to rub the puppies' anogenital area until they have eliminated.

Once the dam has fully recovered from her surgery and has demonstrated appropriate maternal instinctive behavior (protecting, retrieving, grooming, nursing) she can be left with the puppies. Continue to monitor the puppies, keeping in mind that healthy, well-nourished puppies are clean, quiet and sleep when not nursing