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Feeding Weanling Puppies

General Information

Weaning is the process of gradually changing a puppy's diet from mother's milk to solid foods. A puppy is considered a weanling from the time it first receives food other than mother's milk until the time it no longer nurses. This period is usually from 3 to 4 weeks of age until 6 to 8 weeks of age.

Early weanlings should be weighed frequently and their weight recorded. Progressive weight gain and content puppies are good indicators of adequate nutrition.

Watch for these danger signs: Puppies that lose or do not gain weight, inactive puppies that feel cooler than their litter mates and puppies with poor muscle tone as compared with the rest of the litter.

Begin weaning the puppies around 3 to 4 weeks of age by pan-feeding warmed bitch's milk substitute added to a good-quality puppy diet to form a watery gruel. Because the puppies are still nursing, they will regulate their own consumption from the pan, so you do not have to be concerned with the total amount they consume. Milk substitutes can be purchased from your veterinarian or commercially. The first few pan feedings usually consist of the puppies wading through the food and lapping very little. Most puppies readily lap from a pan after 3 or 4 feedings.

When the puppies are readily eating the thin gruel, the amount of milk substitute added should be gradually reduced and the gruel slowly thickened. The goal is to eliminate the milk substitute by 6 to 7 weeks of age. At this age, the pups should be eating good-quality puppy food, softened with water, 3 to 4 times daily. Water can be eliminated when the teeth have erupted and the pups are vigorously chewing.

A second option is to add warm water (instead of milk substitute) to a high-quality prescription diet (such as p/d) to make up the gruel. These diets are available through your veterinarian also.

CAUTION: Do not allow the gruel or other moist or canned foods to remain at room temperature for more than 2 to 3 hours. After that time, the bacteria will have begun to multiply to dangerous levels and could lead to serious or deadly intestinal disorders. As a precaution, the food should remain above 41° F for only 2 hours or less.

Recommended products:

Bitch's milk substitute: _____

Puppy foods: _____