

Policies and Procedures

Raising Neonatal Puppies 4-6 Weeks of Age

While raising puppies is fun and incredibly rewarding it also requires some work and close monitoring. Puppies at this age are susceptible to what we refer to as fading puppy syndrome as well as weakness and possible death due to diarrhea, intestinal parasites, decreased appetite, anemia, and even being too cold.

Puppies 4-6 weeks may appear to be thriving and growing but without measuring food and output there is no way to know for sure how your puppy(ies) are doing. Because puppies will go downhill very quickly, often within 24hrs, it is best to weigh each puppy daily, regardless of outward, visible health.

Puppies should be weighed using a baby scale or a human scale if the scale can read fractions of a pound. Puppies should be steadily gaining weight. Any puppy that loses 0.5lb in a 24hr period should be brought to the medical clinics attention by emailing fostermedical@sanantoniopetsalive.org and appointment@sanantoniopetsalive.org

Supply List

- Baby or human scale
- Heating pad
- Thermometer
- Puppy food, pate style wet, kibble, formula if able

Expected Daily Care

- Puppies should be weighed and weights documented on the provided chart
- Puppies should be allowed to free fed and should have easy access to fresh food and water.

Important Information

The following should be considered red flags:

- Decrease in appetite
- Diarrhea that is not improving in 72hrs
- Very watery or explosive diarrhea, even once
- Losing interest in playing with littermates
- Suddenly being "bullied" by littermates

The following should be considered emergencies:

- White or grey gums
- Cold to the touch
- Hot to the touch
- Very watery or explosive diarrhea
- Not eating, even missing one meal
- Lethargic or unresponsive

Feeding

At 4 weeks of age puppies begin the weaning process and start to eat gruel. Gruel is watered down

canned food, pate style not chunky, that is blended and made into a thin paste. If your puppies are eating the gruel well and seem hungry they can be started on canned puppy food.

Ideally gruel is diluted with puppy milk replacer. Because this is expensive and SAPA! is not able to provide it, water is used and the alternative. If you would like to purchase milk replacer to use SAPA! recommends Esbilac and Royal Canine Puppy Mousse is an excellent food to use as gruel for the early weaning process because it already has formula in it and is the perfect consistency. Both of these can be found at most pet stores.

Dehydration

Puppies stay hydrated by drinking water and eating canned food. Most puppies will adequately hydrate themselves. You can do a quick elasticity test. Pinch a little skin between your thumb and forefinger on your dog's back. When you release it, it should pop back into place immediately. Puppies should always have access to clean water.

If you are concerned your puppy is becoming or is dehydrated email the medical staff at fostermedical@sanantoniopetsalive.org

Temperature

Your puppy's temperature does not need to be taken regularly. However, if you are concerned a puppy is too cold or running a fever it is best if you can take a rectal temperature. It is not difficult to take a rectal temperature but is easiest with two people. Using petroleum jelly or a similar substance insert the thermometer into the rectum. A normal temperature is between 100.5 and 102.

Hypoglycemia

Puppies will quickly become hypoglycemic if they miss even one meal. Just like a baby, puppies need to eat 3-4 times a day and always have access to fresh food. If puppies become even slightly hypoglycemic they can begin to go downhill very quickly.

Signs of hypoglycemia are:

- wobbliness
- listlessness
- seizures

If your puppy has a decreased appetite or not eating, contact the medical team at fostermedical@sanantoniopetsalive.org and appointment@sanantoniopetsalive.org.

Anemia

Puppies are also susceptible to anemia. Anemia is a loss of red blood cells that, in puppies, is most often caused by an infestation of fleas or intestinal worms. The easiest way to check for anemia is to look for white or very pale gums. Normal puppy gum color is close to salmon pink. If your puppy's gums are white or grey contact fostermedical@sanantoniopetsalive.org and appointment@sanantoniopetsalive.org as this may be an emergency.

If you are concerned your puppy's gums are not pink enough email medtechs@austinpetsalive.org. Attaching a photo is helpful.

Parvovirus Signs and Symptoms

Parvovirus is a highly contagious, serious, life-threatening condition that affects the intestinal tract and causes severe vomiting and diarrhea. SAPA! has a Parvo ICU and successfully treats the virus. The key to survival is early detection.

The signs and symptoms are:

- Decrease or loss of appetite
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea in conjunction with one of the above
- Lethargy

If your puppy is experiencing any of these symptoms please email the clinic at appointment@sanantoniopetsalive.org and fostermedical@sanantoniopetsalive.org

Meatball Test

For the most part a healthy puppy will always be excited to eat a treat. As a rule of thumb if a puppy is refusing to eat a meatball of canned food they may be sick. If you are concerned your puppy may be sick with either fever, parvo, parasites, or respiratory infection please offer a meatball of yummy food.

If they do not eat it email the clinic at appointment@sanantoniopetsalive.org and fostermedical@sanantoniopetsalive.org

Activity

It is important to recognize a lethargic puppy from a tired puppy. Puppies will normally play, play, play then get tired and sleep for a period of time. If your puppy is going through this cycle that is normal.

If your puppy does not play contact SAPA! by email at appointment@sanantoniopetsalive.org and fostermedical@sanantoniopetsaliv.org.

SAPA! Fading Puppy Protocol

Fading Puppy Syndrome is a life-threatening emergency in which a puppy “crashes” and begins to fade away. **If not dealt with immediately it can result in death.** If you are fostering puppies 6 weeks or younger, it is a very good idea to familiarize yourself with this handout so you know what to do if it happens.

Symptoms

- Extreme Lethargy - not getting up, unable to stand, not responding when pet
- Gasping for breath
- Whining/Crying out

When this happens, it is vital that you take these immediate steps!

FPS is caused by 2 things : Hypothermia (being too cold) and Hypoglycemia (not enough blood sugar). You must combat both of these things or the puppy will die.

Treatment

Step 1- Get them warm

Create the “burrito” towel. Immediately wrap the puppy up in a towel like a burrito leaving their face exposed only. Their whole body, tail, ears, and paws should be in the towel, only nose and mouth exposed. *Do not take the puppy out of the towel to adjust them, check on them, etc. - this is very important!* Every time you take them out you will make them cold again, even if it is only for a second.

You must apply an extra source of heat (listed below). The puppy's body can't warm itself up with just a towel alone, you have to apply extra heat. Also, your body temperature is much lower than what a puppy should be, so trying to warm them up with your body heat won't work either.

If you have a heating pad - Then wrap a heating pad *turned onto low* around the towel - duct tape it or secure it around the towel so it stays wrapped around them. Don't let the heating pad touch them directly, it can cause burns, make sure the 'burrito' towel is between their skin and the heating pad.

If you don't have a heating pad - you can either

- A. Keep your dryer running full of towels. Grab a new hot one every 5 minutes and wrap this new hot towel around the “burrito” towel. After 5 minutes, trade that towel out for a new hot one. Don't remove the “burrito” towel.
- B. Fill 2 socks full of rice, tie the ends of them so it doesn't spill out. Throw them in the microwave for 3 minutes. Keep them next to the puppy on the outside of the burrito towel. Every 30 minutes reheat one sock and leave the other next to the puppy so she doesn't cool off.

Step 2- Get their blood sugar up

Once you get the heat on them, get a bowl or Tupperware and a few tablespoons of sugar in some hot water. Stir it up so you get a sugar water solution - you don't want it super syrupy like pancake syrup, but you do want it to be as strong as possible while still pretty runny. Undiluted honey, karo syrup, agave nectar can be substituted. Using a syringe or your finger give 3 drops every 3 minutes into the mouth. If they aren't swallowing, try not to get it down the throat, try to get it on the tongue or gums. Set an egg timer or use the stopwatch on your cell phone to make sure you are doing it at least every 3 minutes. Every 5 minutes or 10 minutes will not work, it must be every 3 minutes.

Step 3 – Email our medical clinic

Email fostermedical@sanantoniopetsalive.org and appointment@sanantoniopetsalive.org Don't leave your puppy to make this call or forget to do your sugar every 3 minutes. They won't have any extra advice for you that isn't in this handout, but they will need to be made aware of what is going on. Starting on an antibiotic is usually necessary as even subtle changes in gut bacteria can cause FPS.

Prognosis

We generally have very good success with these puppies if you follow the above steps. We DO NOT recommend you rush them to the vet for many reasons:

You have the motivation to sit right there with them and make them your top priority. A vet clinic has many patients it is helping and can't give your puppy the 100% undivided attention you can give them.

Your puppy will continue to be cold/hypoglycemic on the way to the vet, in the waiting room, in the hospital while they try to determine what is wrong, etc. Most puppies won't last long enough for them to start the treatments there.

Dr. Jefferson came up with these protocols based on what would be done if she saw these patients in her clinic. Most clinics would do the same thing - try to keep them warm and get their blood sugar up. We did a test-trial period a few years ago of having all of the fading puppy syndrome seen by Dr. Jefferson or a technician to try other treatments, and we had a much higher failure rate (it was close to 100% failure) than if the foster did it themselves at home. This was because the puppies were not made to withstand travel and the clinic staff cannot devote 100% of their time to them (but a foster can).

Keep in mind, it can sometimes take hours for them to come out of it and start acting normally again. Once they do come out of it, make sure you contact the med techs (fostermedical@sanantoniopetsalive.org and appointment@sanantoniopetsalive.org) to discuss what could have possibly caused them to fade in the first place and make sure we have the puppy on all the right medical treatments for any illnesses they have that may have caused it. An exam may be necessary.

Also keep in mind, even with all the love and attention and perfect treatment of this condition, some of them still won't make it. Try not to blame yourself during this difficult time. Remember, if it wasn't for you, every puppy you've ever fostered would have been killed at another shelter and never given a chance at life.