

SO NOW YOU HAVE FRENCHIE PUPPIES!

You bred your Frenchie bitch. You got her through two months of pregnancy. You did everything right, took her in to the vet's office, got a c-section. Now you have puppies. The panic sets in. What have you done? What do you do next?

Once you get the mother and puppies home, the work is just beginning. Enjoy the brief flush of satisfaction from the accomplishment. There is lots left to do.

THE FIRST TWENTY-FOUR HOURS

As soon as you get home, warm up the whelping box. (Is it covered to protect the pups from drafts?) Once it is warm, put the newborn puppies inside. Consider this the First Commandment: Keep the puppies warm!

For the first few hours, the mother will be weak and disoriented from surgery. If she has lost a lot of blood, she may even be in shock. She needs to be kept comfortable and warm, too. But one warning: Do not leave her alone with the puppies until you are certain she has recovered.

Because of the surgery, some mothers have difficulty recognizing that the puppies are theirs. She should be introduced to them gently, and allowed to smell them and lick them. As soon as possible, lay her down in the whelping box (which should be warm and protected) and put the new puppies on her to feed. Initially, they may have to be coaxed to attach to a nipple. Persevere. It is extremely important that they get some of the colostrum, the yellowish pre-milk that the mother will secrete at first. It is loaded with antibodies the puppies need to establish their immune systems.

The Second Commandment is: Keep the puppies fed. The puppies should be encouraged to feed as often as possible. They should definitely feed once every two

hours during the initial days. They will quickly gain strength and seek out the mother on their own once everyone has settled into a routine.

Once the mother has recognized her puppies, she should begin to lick them and clean them. The puppies' digestive systems respond initially to the mothers' licking, and they will not eliminate waste until stimulated. This is the Third Commandment: Keep their digestive tracts functioning. If she is not licking them, you will have to substitute. Rather than doing it exactly as she would, the best way is to use cotton balls moistened with warm water. Rub gently underneath to make them urinate, and behind to make them defecate. It takes a little practice to get the hang of it, but it isn't hard. This should be done following each feeding.

Keeping the digestive tract functioning involves the simple rule: put something in, something comes out. If the elimination of waste stops, the puppy will cease feeding, and will quickly start to waste away. If the puppy becomes chilled, the digestive tract almost always shuts down.

In every litter, there will be stronger, larger more dominant puppies. They will feed more vigorously, and will tend to push the other puppies away. This becomes a serious problem with a larger litter. If necessary, move any dominant pups to one side to allow the others ample opportunity to feed.

During the first twenty-four hours, the mother should not be left unattended with her puppies. She will still be weak and disoriented. She may accidentally lay on a pup or step on it. If she becomes frightened, she might bite or injure one. If you are right there, you can reassure her. You can also intervene if something goes wrong. You will have to be there anyway, as the pups will need to feed the moment your eyelids get heavy.

Hint: it's really helpful to have two people to do this. One can get some rest while the other holds vigil. Otherwise, you will learn why it is said that sleep deprivation is the most successful form of torture.

THE FIRST WEEK

Somewhere after the first twenty-four hours, the mother's milk should come in. The yellowish colostrum will be replaced by pure white. And quantity should increase. You should notice a gradual change in the puppies. From a somewhat wrinkled appearance, they should start to plump up. Their tummies will start to become engorged after each feeding.

If the mother is licking and cleaning the puppies, and is allowing them to feed, all is well. You can relax, somewhat. Some mothers take several days to settle into motherhood. If that is the case, clean the puppies regularly to stimulate elimination. As the puppies grow, they will learn to eliminate without stimulus. But if they are not

cleaned, their little tails can end up stuck to their behinds. If you are remiss and allow that to happen, you will have to dissolve and dislodge the mess so they can eliminate. And it can set up like epoxy. Use warm water and cotton, and work at it as gently as you can. It may take some time.

If the mother is reluctant to clean the pups, hold them up to her to show her what she needs to do. Once shown a messy pup, most mothers will relent and start to lick.

Occasionally, the opposite syndrome will occur. A mother will clean too eagerly, resulting in raw, chafed little butts. If the pups are crying inordinately, this is a possible cause. Petroleum jelly for the chafing, or neomycin ointment will help ease the discomfort.

If the mother's milk does not come in, you have a problem. Call your vet immediately and have her checked. In the meantime, you will have to bottle feed. Do not allow the pups to go hungry for long. Once they become weak, it will be difficult to get them to feed.

There are many recipes around for substitute milk to feed them. Nowadays, a simple expedient is to buy prepared milk substitute for puppies. All you have to do is heat it to the right temperature and use it. The containers have complete directions.

Bottles and nipples designed specifically for feeding puppies are available. Using newborn infant bottles and nipples should substitute nicely. If the puppies are older, you may have to widen the opening in the nipple to afford greater flow.

As with breast feeding, bottle feeding needs to be done every two to four hours. Make sure each puppy gets enough. If they are not feeding well, give them smaller meals more often.

If you have to bottle feed, be very careful. Because of their flat faces, it is easy for the puppies to aspirate milk. That can go one of two ways. More common is the symptom known as "milknose", also observed in human children. When puppies feed too vigorously, milk will come out their nose. Be sure to clear it out completely, as it can cause infection. It can also be aspirated later into the lungs.

The greatest risk with bottle feeding is that the puppy will aspirate milk directly into the lungs. If you take your time, and hold the puppy flat enough, this should not occur. If it does, you can tell by the rattling sound as the puppy breathes. Go directly to the vet.

For those who are technically more accomplished, another alternative is "tube feeding". This is where a flexible plastic tube is inserted carefully down the throat so that the milk can be placed directly in the stomach. If done improperly, tube feeding puts the milk directly into the lung.

Most important in this technique is to have a tube cut to exactly the right length. You need to measure how far the tube needs to go to reach the stomach. Tube feeding is best left to experts. Learning how to tube feed is best done with somebody experienced in the technique. Once the technique is learned, though, it is much faster and more efficient than bottle feeding. It is not dependent on the puppy's desire to feed. It is also the technique of last resort if a puppy is too weak to feed voluntarily.

As the puppies grow and feed, they will become stronger and more active. They will more readily seek out the mother themselves. Although their eyes are not open, they can find her by smell and touch (sometimes they seem totally lost), and by her body heat. The whole foreface is a complex of sensoria designed to find the mother, determine where a nipple is, and even to detect which is their regular nipple.

THE SECOND WEEK

If you make it this far, you should be out of the woods. You can start to relax a little more. If all goes well, the puppies should open their eyes around the tenth day. At first, their eyes will look scary and vacant when they open. Their ability to focus comes later.

Frenchies take more time than other breeds to come up onto their rear legs. (I have seen greyhound puppies on their feet before their eyes even open!) But they should begin to get up on their front legs somewhere around the second week. They need a surface with good traction to get up on. Remnant carpet pieces work well. Slippery surfaces will make it hard for them to strengthen the pelvic muscles that hold the rear legs in position.

WEEKS THREE AND FOUR

Many things can go wrong. Infections, viruses, congenital defects can all cause puppies to sicken and die. The mother can step or lay on a puppy and unintentionally cause injury or death. Amazingly, most puppies make it through.

Somewhere between four and six weeks of age, the puppies will need to be weaned. If you are slow in starting them on solid food, the mother will let you know. (Once the puppies start to develop teeth, her desire to let them feed declines precipitously.) There are commercial products available, and most serious breeders have their own recipes for mush to give to puppies. The most important thing to remember is that it needs to be soft enough that they can lap it up at first.

One simple alternative is to purchase good quality dry puppy food (with a complete array of vitamins and minerals) and pulverize it in a blender. Take the resultant

powder and mix it into a paste using goat's milk. Keep thinning it until it is just capable of being poured. Then warm it (a microwave oven works well) to about body temperature. Thin it a little more once it is warm, as heating will tend to thicken it. For the first attempt, the final product should be thin enough that the puppies can lap it up.

Take the mother out while you are giving them the solid food. It may take some effort to coax them to try it. (It can also end up looking like a food fight in a Three Stooges comedy.) Don't expect too much the first time. If they try it, good. If not, don't be discouraged. They will do better the next day.

Once you are done, let the mother back in to clean up the remaining food. She should help you with the puppies, but you may have to clean off the messiest of the puppies yourself. Start supplying them water to drink. The solid food will make them thirsty.

You should be able to get the puppies to eat the semisolid food in a period of about a week. Once they will accept it readily, you can remove the mother. The puppies will need to be fed around three times a day once they are on their own. Gradually reduce the liquid portion of the food. (If they will not accept it, it is too dry.) The move to solid food will cause a quantum leap in growth. The puppies should grow less soft and beanbaggy, and should start strengthening up.

THE SECOND MONTH

At around four weeks of age, you should start the puppies on their inoculations. Their immune systems will need to be built up by the time they are six months old. Talk to your vet to set up an immunization schedule.

Somewhere between five and eight weeks of age, the puppies' ears should come up. Suddenly they will look like Frenchies. By this time, you should have strong indications of their personalities, as well. A noisy five-week-old will likely be a vocal adult as well. A loving one or a shy one should correspond similarly.

Training can begin somewhere around this stage. It is surprising how much a willing young puppy can learn. Familiarize them with a collar and lead. Teach them proper bathroom etiquette.

Between eight and twelve weeks of age, the puppies you aren't keeping should be ready for new homes. Make sure that any new owners understand the special care required with bull breeds. They need to know they are indoor-outdoor dogs, and should not be left out at night. They shouldn't be allowed to get too hot, or too cold. New owners should be encouraged to develop a relationship with their vet before any problems occur.

Most importantly, let new owners know they can come to you for help if there is any problem with the puppy. You should be able to help them with the simple stuff, and warn them to get to the vet with anything more major. You want the puppies to do well in their new environments.

FINAL EVALUATION

If you intend to be a serious breeder, you need to look over what you produced and evaluate it for successes and failures. If there was something you were breeding for, did you get it? If there was something you were breeding away from, did you succeed? What other surprise faults and problems came in with the breeding?

Once you have done this for half a dozen generations, you should be able to see some trends. Some characteristics will pop up again after a few generations of dormancy. Others will dominate and stay with you no matter what you do. How you handle these characteristics and where you go is all part of what makes you a good breeder.

John Niedhamer