

Tube Feeding a Litter

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The biggest advantage of tube feeding is that it takes very little time and you always know exactly how much milk the pup is getting.

Before I go into the technical side of tube feeding, let me first explain the background to my own introduction to it (as accurately as I can remember, as it was quite a number of years ago).

Back in 1984 we bought in a bitch from the UK breeder Marion Gregory. Her name was Moonygate M'Deera and she was bred on Corydon lines. We later had her mated to Vera and Eddie Hickson's dog, Fernmoss Editorial of Bririch.

It was a large litter of eight healthy pups and all was well in the first day or two. However, things took a turn for the worse and the pups began to fade. The vet was called and it became clear that Shelley was running a high temperature due to infection – caused by retention of an afterbirth. This infection was being passed on to the puppies through her milk, so now we not only had a very sick dam, we also had a litter of weakened pups, that could not suck from a bottle. I should say here that since then I always count the number of afterbirths passed, and make sure it matches the number of puppies born!

Feeding with an eye dropper was an option but a very unsatisfactory method. If any of the milk ends up in their lungs they are not strong enough to expel it and will develop pneumonia. It was suggested to me by Joan Walsh that I might tube feed the pups, and she was able to supply me with a tiny tube and syringe – and a quick demonstration on how to use it. Tube feeding was nerve-wracking at first but needs must and I soon got quite relaxed and efficient with the process. We managed to save most of the pups, which I don't believe would have survived using the eye dropper or bottle methods.

Over the years I've unfortunately had other occasions when tube feeding intervention was necessary. Tube feeding, or for that matter any intervention, should only be done when necessary and a physical demonstration would be highly recommended. Nowadays it's possible to view YouTube videos. Here's a description of the process.

Equipment Needed

- Syringe 10 ml
- Feeding tubes (soft rubber) Tube FR6x40cm
- Sterilising Fluid
- Replacement Milk Formula. Make up according to manufacturer's directions
- Jug for formula
- Towel
- Bowl of boiling water (to clean tube between pups)

Measure the distance from the mouth to the last rib and mark the tube. You'll have to measure again and change the mark as the pup grows.

Hold the tube against the puppy and measure the puppy from the nostril to the last rib. This is the length of tube you will be inserting via the mouth to the stomach. Mark the tube with a pen or marker



Method

Make up the formula according to manufacturer's instructions.

Step 1

Fill the syringe with more formula than you will need. Attach the feeding tube to the syringe and depress the syringe to expel any air or water from both the syringe and the tube into a waste receptacle, to prime them before feeding.

Step 2

Test temperature of formula to ensure it is not too hot. This is done similarly to a baby's bottle by dropping some formula onto your wrist. The formula should feel very slightly warm or close to body temperature.

Step3

Placing the puppy to be fed. Using a clean towel placed on either a flat surface like a table or on your lap, whichever is most comfortable for you. Place the pup on all fours lying on the towel, belly on the table allowing the front paws to lie flat on the surface. With the palm of your hand at the back of the puppy's head, bringing your thumb and index finger around the head onto either side of the mouth. Position the head slightly forward and very slightly upward to help with the tube insertion.



Diagram

Step 4

Inserting the tube.

Dip the end of the tube into some formula and then place the tube into the puppy's mouth, aiming the tube towards a spot about three-quarter way back on the top palette and allow to drop onto the centre of the tongue. The pup should by reflex begin to swallow the tube and with the slightest assistance from you gently pushing and guiding the tube, it should be swallowed until the mark on the tube reaches the front of the mouth. If any resistance to the insertion of the tube is experienced, immediately slowly withdraw the tube and start again.

Step 5

With the feeding tube successfully inserted, gently depress the syringe allowing a small amount of formula into the puppy (about 1ml). Count to three

and press again. Repeat until recommended amount of formula has been administered.

Step 6

Remove the tube slowly. Sterilise the tube between puppies. This can be done by placing in boiling water.

NOTES

Don't forget that puppies need to be helped to eliminate their waste. If the mother is not cleaning the puppies, you'll have to do it. Cotton wool with a tiny drop of olive oil rubbed from the navel downwards will stimulate the puppy to pass urine, and dab gently around the anus to encourage pup to have a bowel movement.

In the first few days of life pups need to be fed every two hours. This can be stretched to three hours during the night.

If diarrhoea should occur (usually after one week of formula) add probiotic into the milk once a day.

A general guide is 1 cc or 1 ml of the milk formula for every 1 oz of the pup's weight, but there will be instructions on the tin.



Result. Full bellies and a nice warm mammy

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