

Puppy & Transitional Periods

NEONATAL PERIOD

(Birth to 12 Days)

The Neonatal Period, from birth to 12 days of age, is devoted to two functions: obtaining nutrition by nursing, and staying warm.

A puppy is not physically self-sufficient when he is born. He needs the warmth of his environment to control his body temperature. He needs physical stimulation to urinate and defecate. He has neither sight nor hearing, and is deficient in his senses of smell taste and touch. He reacts to hot and cold, and to some extent to pain. He also reacts to the smell of mother.

He moves by crawling forward in a circular pattern, moving his head from side to side in an attempt to locate mother. He may vocalize while he's searching, which stimulates mother to nuzzle him and let him know where she is.

The environment affects him only inasmuch as it touches him. While the puppy grows rapidly in size and strength during this period, his behavior patterns remain virtually the same throughout. EEG's taken during the Neonatal Period show no difference between the puppy's brain waves when he is asleep and when he is awake.

TRANSITION PERIOD

(13 Days to 20 Days)

The Transition Period is from 13 to 20 Days and is marked by a number of physical changes in the puppy. At the beginning of this period, the puppy's eyes will open, at an average of 13 days. While his pupils will react to light, the retina is still undeveloped, and he is unable to see objects or movement until around 21 days of age.

The puppy will begin to crawl backward as well as forward, and a few days later he will begin to walk in a wobbly fashion, falling as often as he takes steps forward. Once he starts walking, the puppy no longer crawls. The first teeth erupt at around 20 days, and he begins to bite and chew. Tail wagging also begins during this period, indicating that tail wagging is not reliant upon seeing and hearing, since he cannot yet see or hear.

He begins to react to sounds at an average of 19.5 days, when he startles at a noise, but is unable to locate the source of the sound.

This critical period is one of rapid physical changes. Over a period of just a week, the puppy has changed from a Neonate who cannot hear, walk, move his bowels without stimulation, keep warm by himself or eat other than by sucking, into a puppy who can do all these things.

AWARENESS PERIOD

(21 to 28 Days)

The Awareness Period is from 21 to 28 Days. This is the first week during which the puppy is able to use his senses of sight and hearing. Because the change in his sensory perceptions happens so abruptly, over a 24-hour period in most puppies, he needs a stable environment. Now he has the greatest need for his mother and for a familiar environment. Weaning or moving the litter to a new location at this time in all likelihood will psychologically scar the puppies.

Learning begins during the Awareness Period. It is the time in the puppy's life when he learns what it is to be a dog.

