

PHOTO BY KINGFRIEND

the healthy fancy

Only the Lonely
Raising the Singleton Puppy

by **Lori Hunt, DVM & French Bulldog Breeder**

Anyone who has raised a "singleton" knows that it can be a huge challenge. In many ways, I find raising the single puppy more difficult than even the biggest of litters. I have raised MANY one puppy litters, and consider myself somewhat skilled in it. I'd like to share some hints and tips with the Frenchie Fancy that I've found helpful in raising a single puppy. The information I will discuss is not necessarily breed specific, though it's more common in our breed. Over the years, I have learned that each singleton is different, yet the same. I will address some of the more common issues I encounter with singleton puppies and their moms.

Let's start with the two kinds of singletons. First there is the true one puppy litter. Alternatively, there are those litters that have a sole survivor. There is no difference in caring for the resulting puppies, but the first can have unique issues concerning timing of the section and mammary development prior to whelping. It is absolutely essential that the timing of the cesarean section be carefully mapped out. Single puppies often do not set mom into labor, especially in medium to large sized breeds. Therefore, they have a tendency to be overdue and ultimately not survive. My recommendation is to ALWAYS do ovulation timing while you are breeding so there will be no doubt as to when she is due. The less we guess, the better the chances that the puppy will survive. In my experience there is a high mortality rate (33-50%) for singletons due to not being delivered at the right time. In my own bitches, I schedule the section for 61 – 63 days post ovulation, using her progesterone, her past whelping history as well as family history to help me decide exactly.

After the delivery, the first issue experienced with a singleton is that mom doesn't always have a strong motherly instinct, especially if this is her first litter. It can take several days to weeks for the mom to take over sole mothering of their new charge. I had one bitch take 18 days! Eventually she became a skilled and devoted mom. So often, we take away their chance to be a mom and deny them this learning opportunity to become better for next time. BE PATIENT. Give her a chance to become the mother you and she both want. Pain control post c-section, oxytocin injections for the first 24 hours, calcium supplementation and

her milk supply coming in are a few things that can help improve mothering skills in an otherwise healthy bitch. On the other hand, we have those bitches that "over mother" their puppy; forcefully licking and pushing their charge around the box, tugging on cords, etc. Usually, given time and direction, these too will settle into a better mothering style.

ALWAYS DO OVULATION TIMING SO THERE IS NO DOUBT WHEN THE BITCH IS DUE.

Occasionally some bitches will make more milk than is necessary for that one puppy to grow. It is essential that we monitor these bitches for mastitis. Express milk daily from each teat to be certain no disease is starting. More often that not, milk supply is normally low in bitches with single puppies, as only one puppy nursing doesn't pull milk down at the same rate and volume, as would an entire litter. Often this requires helping mom to make more milk AND supplementation for baby. Oxytocin injections can be administered to increase milk but lose their effectiveness after the first 24 hours. Fenugreek (610 mg), an herbal supplement that is available at most nutrition stores, helps drop milk as well. I use one (1) capsule twice daily until mom and baby smell like maple syrup or her milk has come in, whichever comes second. There is no harm in continuing it past these two events. Calcium supplementation is also useful. Keeping mom VERY well hydrated, pain free, and comfortable is essential to milk production.



Another important aspect to helping mom's milk drop is allowing her HUNGRY puppy to nurse. This seems simple, but often times people worry about the pup, tube or bottle feed her and then let her nurse on mom. She, of course, has a full belly and only half-heartedly nurses. Please, do it the other way around. Let baby nurse on mom while she's hungry, and then "top her off" AFTER with a bottle or tube. I have found if I have another mother, letting her whelps nurse on my single puppy's mom (in a controlled and supervised manner) helps pull her milk in faster. Single puppies are notoriously slow to gain weight, often taking 5 - 7 days to surpass their birth weight and have bigger losses than a puppy of the same age that has littermates. Weigh your puppy daily, or twice daily, but don't panic as long as baby is acting vigorous and nursing. I do not allow my puppies to lose more than 10% of their body weight before intervening. The puppy must stay strong to be able to pull milk in and maintain body temperature without littermates with whom to cuddle. Normal milk intake for a puppy is 1 ounce of milk per 4 ounces of puppy divided throughout the day.



This leads into another very important topic of maintaining a very warm box environment when there is only one puppy. They do not have littermates to snuggle and if mom isn't staying with them constantly they can get chilled and lonely. I recommend keeping the box at 80 - 85 degrees Fahrenheit (26 - 30 degrees Celsius) the first week and decreasing by 3 - 5 degrees F (or 1 C) weekly