

When to Wean

Weaning is the process of puppies starting to get their nutrition from food instead of milk (whether from milk replacer or mom). Ideally, the weaning process should be gradual, beginning when the pups are three weeks old (or when their teeth start erupting) and taking a few weeks to finish the transition away from mom.¹

Some moms provide better maternal care than others. In a rescue environment, we are not privileged to have hand-picked moms for their temperament.

This means that the importance and pace of the weaning depends a lot on what mom is doing, what she wants to do, and the impact of nursing has on her behavior and health.^{2,3}

Unless mom's health requires faster weaning, it is better to let mom set the pace,^{1,2} and it is critical that mom gets significant time away from her pups (as much as all day, only returning at night).¹

If mom will be separated from her pups earlier than seven weeks, it may be better to separate when pups are under five weeks of age as a study has shown that there is a lack of stress response to brief maternal separation at this age compared to between five and six weeks.

¹ Greer, Marty. "My First Litter: Weaning Puppies." Revival Animal Health, 30 Sept. 2022, www.revivalanimal.com/learning-center/my-first-litter-how-to-wean-puppies.

² Malm, K. and Jensen, P. (1997), Weaning and Parent-Offspring Conflict in the Domestic Dog. *Ethology*, 103: 653-664. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1439-0310.1997.tb00176.x>

³ Santos, N. R., et al. "A Review of Maternal Behaviour in Dogs and Potential Areas for Further Research." *The Journal of Small Animal Practice*, vol. 61, no. 2, 1 Feb. 2020, pp. 85-92, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7027574/.

