

## Weaning Diarrhoea in Kittens and Puppies

**Written by Dr Julie Summerfield**

Among your young patients, diarrhoea and gastrointestinal disease will be a common reason to present to your clinic, alongside the usual checkups vaccinations and other preventative visits.

Gastrointestinal disorders are more common in puppies & kittens due to the nature of their immature gastrointestinal tracts and immune systems. They are also particularly vulnerable due to the time in their lives where they are weaning from their mothers, maternally derived antibody protection is dwindling, while their own antibodies are still forming, leading to an immunity gap.

At the same time, they are beginning to socialize more widely with other people and animals, encountering further potential sources of infection, as well as being exposed to different diets, other challenges, and stresses.

This can lead to Gastrointestinal disturbances such as diarrhoea, vomiting, constipation, and ill thrift. Specific causes can vary from parasitic, infectious (viral, bacterial), to other environmental stresses and changes in diet. Lots of variables determine the severity including immunity, pathogen virulence, co-infections, environmental support, or lack of, and of course nutrition plays an enormous role.

Because of limited energy & metabolic reserves in these puppies & kittens, dehydration and hypoglycemia can occur rapidly and have a severe impact on the health and prognosis. There can also be long lasting effects on the structure of the gut lining from inflammation and functional loss.

No longer is it recommended to starve for some time to rest the gut. Studies have demonstrated benefits of feeding during acute episodes of diarrhoea, helping to maintain the integrity of the digestive tract, limiting destruction of the intestinal villi, intestinal permeability, and bacterial translocation. Puppies suffering from parvovirus that are given early enteral feeding show quicker weight gain and better recovery of normal appetite and stool quality compared to puppies fasted until vomiting ceases.

Highly digestible foods should be offered to ensure transition between milk and solid food, and rationing to avoid diarrhoea from overconsumption is important — the daily ration should be divided typically into four small meals to aid digestion. Appropriate caloric intake is key for young patients, as they have a high metabolic rate and limited reserves, to prevent hypoglycaemia and hypothermia.

Diet should also be formulated for growth with adequate nutrients such as calcium and protein and antioxidants to support immunity. As well as high energy from protein and fat, prebiotics and balanced fibres support digestion and gut transit. This helps maintain a healthy microbiome, which is key to strengthening immunity, barrier defence and functional absorptive health of the gut.

While medications maybe required for specific disease, a multifactorial approach that includes first response nutritional intervention is important, including high digestibility to help prevent inflammation, maldigestion & malnutrition, while prebiotic fibre promotes the “good” gut bacterial population. Managing gastrointestinal dysbiosis and restoring balance is the goal for good digestive health and this of course, must include nourishing the gut itself.

Puppy and Kitten First Response diets can be prescribed with confidence. Scientifically formulated, Royal Canin GI diets provide critical gastrointestinal support while a specific diagnosis is explored. The specific mousse texture can help food intake when there is decreased appetite.

**DIGESTIVE SUPPORT**

A highly digestible formula with balanced fibres to support a healthy digestion and gastrointestinal transit.



**OPTIMAL GROWTH**

High energy formula with adapted levels of nutrients (including protein and calcium) to meet the needs of a growing puppy or kitten.



**MICROBIOME SUPPORT**

Formula with selected prebiotics to support a healthy gut and intestinal microbiome.



**GASTROINTESTINAL PUPPY    GASTROINTESTINAL KITTEN**

