

## Newborn Calves that Just Don't Suck

Frustration. That's what we have with a newborn calf that won't suck. The most common reason for a weak sucking response is a hard birth. Either the calf is severely traumatized or has an acutely swollen muzzle and tongue.

**We recommend feeding 3.5 to 4 litres of mature cow colostrum with an esophageal or tube feeder as soon as possible after birth (large-breed calves).**

If the calf is unable to stand, try to get her up on her chest prior to inserting the esophageal tube. Tube feeding in this upright position is much less likely to spill colostrum into the windpipe (trachea) than with the calf lying on her side. See also "Colostrum: Tube feeding – 4 rules" – click [HERE](#)

If the calf is strong enough she will benefit greatly if you take time to get her standing and dried off. Getting the calf to stand and drying her off is likely to increase her metabolism substantially higher than her resting level. She will breathe better, too. See also "Assisted birth calf care checklist" – click [HERE](#),

As a precaution because many of these calves are immune-suppressed we often use supplementary injections within the first 24 hours. Discuss this possible treatment with your veterinarian along with a recommended treatment level appropriate for your farm.

A few calves have persistent sucking problems in spite of careful care and supplementary injections. When this problem is combined with inability to stand, ask your veterinarian to examine the calf for a possible complications arising from a late gestation BVD infection in her dam. Some of these calves are pretty hopeless cases.

The majority of the calves that are not sick will come around after several days of tube feeding. However, there will be 1 or 2 calves out of 500 that don't learn to suck. They never learn to suck on a nipple.

But, they can learn to drink. They may respond to bucket training. Sometimes they will drink first with just plain water or an electrolyte

solution. Then, they can progress to drinking milk or milk replacer from a pail.