

## Growing Up Wolf

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Wild wolf packs are a lot like many human families. A female and male wolf meet and establish a pack. Most wolves in the pack are related to each other, so pups are siblings and live with Mom and Dad, and even aunts and uncles. When pups become yearlings, they help Mom and Dad hunt, protect their established territories and care for newborn puppies.

Sometimes a wolf will leave their pack and create their own pack. Other times, wolves that leave their pack will be adopted into another pack as a family member. In these situations, wolf packs can look a lot like step-families or adoptive-families.

### Lupine Timeline

Late Winter through Early Spring | Newborn to Five Weeks Old | Five to Ten Weeks Old | Six Months to One Year Old | Lifespan

Time	Event
<b>January through May</b>	A breeding couple that establishes a pack is called a breeding pair. Breeding occurs each year in the late winter and pups are born after a gestation period of about two months.
	The mother and other pack members participate in establishing and digging a den, where the pups will be born. The den area is located away from any disturbances, such as people or roads. A den can be dug out of the ground, in a hollow log, rock crevice, or even an abandoned beaver lodge!
	The entire pack is focused on provisioning the pregnant female during this time. Dad may bring the Mom food at this time if she does not want to hunt herself.
<b>Early Spring</b>	The breeding pair of wolves has a litter of pups that consists of four to six little ones on average. The family lives in a den at the time the pups are born. The pups, which are born blind and deaf, will stay for up to four weeks.

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Time	Event

<b>Birth to Two Weeks</b>	<p>Pups rely on smell and touch to explore and learn. They also take lots of naps! They communicate at this young age by making noise such as squeaking, whining and grunting. They do this most often when they are hungry or Mom is too far away. Communication with their mother is usually to let her know when they want to nurse, since the only food they get at this time is Mom's milk.</p> <p>At this age, Mom is bonding with her babies and has a lot of work to do. She licks them to keep them clean. She even licks her pups to stimulate them to urinate and defecate—to pee and poop! If Mom needs a break from the pups, sometimes Dad or other wolves in the pack will babysit.</p>
<b>Three to Five Weeks Old</b>	<p>The pups can see and hear, and start exploring their surroundings—though they are not very coordinated yet, so they can't go far! All members of the pack take care of the puppies and are very protective if intruders come into the area. Mom may even gently carry her puppies in her mouth to move them to another den site if the pack feels threatened.</p> <p>By now, the pups can eat some solid foods, though it must be regurgitated by an adult wolf since the pups' jaws aren't strong enough to chew meat. When hungry, the pups will go up to any adult and lick their muzzles. The pack members find this irresistible and will regurgitate food for the pups. An adult wolf's diet consists of animals such as elk, deer, moose, bison, caribou, bison, mice, beavers, hare, squirrels, and even fish and crabs. They are also scavengers so they look for carcasses of dead animals, called carrion, to snack on. All this food is what adult wolves "throw-up" for the puppies to eat.</p> <p>The pups start using more of the communications that adults use, such as moaning, growling, yelping, woofing, and whining. Around this time, they also step outside of their den for the first time and will start howling as well. Soon after, they join in the daily chorus howls with the entire pack. It is like a family sing-along!</p>

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<b>Time</b>	<b>Event</b>
<b>Five to Ten Weeks Old</b>	<p>Around this time, the pack moves to another location called a "rendezvous site." Here, the pups can play and explore trails with a "baby sitter," while other adult pack members go hunting.</p> <p>Soon, the toddler pups become more independent and need less attention from Mom. They are also incredibly playful and siblings start playing "games" with each other that are similar to "tag" and wrestling. Scientists think playing like this helps pups develop skills they will need as adults and also helps them bond as a family.</p> <p>At this stage, conflict behavior has been observed when food is around. If a pup becomes protective of a piece of food they may warn others to stay away. This is done by growling or making little lunges at an approaching sibling. The pups also start caching (hiding) food—just like adult wolves do—so they have something to snack on later.</p> <p>By now, the pups have sharp little teeth. They use their mouths to engage with adults by playing with them and soliciting food and attention. Since pups use their mouths to play and communicate, they sometimes hurt other pack members by accidentally biting too hard! Pups also can get a bit rowdy! Adult wolves will discipline them by snapping or lunging at them—but they never hurt the pups. It just gets their attention!</p>

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<b>Time</b>	<b>Event</b>
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<b>Four to Eight Months Old</b>	Up until now, pups howl at anything they see or hear. If they are mobile enough to accompany adult wolves on a hunt, the pups begin to understand that their low-pitched, long howls help them talk to one another over vast territories. They are primarily observers at this time, learning the pack's hunting culture. They still lack the skills to survive, but they now feed on kills with the rest of the pack.
<b>Four to Eight Months Old</b>	The pups grow very rapidly over the summer and though they are not yet full adults when fall comes, they can start to go hunting with the pack.
	When hunting in the fall and winter months, wolves in North America are looking for large mammals, such as deer, moose, and elk. Wolves can survive on as little as 1.1 kilograms (2.5 pounds) per day, or can eat up to 10 kilograms (22 pounds) in one feeding —and then go a week without eating. This style of eating is called feast or famine.
	Wolves have established territories that they will generally defend from other packs. A reason a pack may leave their territory and cross into another pack's territory is for its resources, like better hunting grounds. This can lead to fights between the two packs, which may result in the deaths of some members.
	Wolves hunt as a team, taking down prey with teeth and teamwork, unlike solitary hunters like mountain lions and bears that also use their sharp claws and strength. These ambush predators overpower their prey with explosive but short-lived attacks, whereas wolves rely on each other, physical endurance and their capacity to hunt over longer distances.
	Around seven months, they are nearly indistinguishable from adults. It is crucial that they reach full size before the coming winter, so they put on weight rapidly. During this time of accelerated growth, pups can starve or become weak and susceptible to disease. It's estimated that only half of wolf pups survive to adulthood.
<b>Nine Months to One Year Old</b>	The pups are now nearly full-grown and performing all the activities adult pack members do, such as marking and monitoring their territory.
	Wolves mark their territory by urinating, defecating, and wiping their feet along the perimeter and inside the area. Wolves from other packs that come into the territory can smell their scent and will know they are trespassing. Breeding pairs of adult wolves will often mark their territory together.
<b>Two to Three Years Old</b>	Young wolves often leave their home pack in search of a mate to form their own pack. If the young wolves remain in their original pack, they will help care for new puppies the next year by defending them and feeding them, just like the adults did for them. Some grown-up pups that stay may even replace the breeding pair when they become older.

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<b>Time</b>	<b>Event</b>
<b>Lifespan</b>	In the wild, wolves usually live to be around 5 to 12 years old. In zoos, wolves can live much longer—up to 20 years.
	Wolves face many threats.— other wolves, other predators, and even from their prey. One kick from an elk or a gore from a bison can kill a wolf.
	The biggest threat to wolves is humans. In many places people have hunted wolves until they are completely gone from their native habitat.

## VOCABULARY

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
<b>adopt</b>	<i>verb</i>	to formally raise and care for a child of other biological parents.
<b>breed</b>	<i>verb</i>	to produce offspring.
<b>family</b>	<i>noun</i>	group of organisms that come from the same ancestors and share similar characteristics. Family is also a classification in chemistry and math.
<b>offspring</b>	<i>noun</i>	the children of a person or animal.
<b>sibling</b>	<i>noun</i>	brother or sister.
<b>territory</b>	<i>noun</i>	land an animal, human, or government protects from intruders.

## For Further Exploration

### Reference

- National Geographic: Animals—Wolves

### Websites

- Living With Wolves



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