



## PREGNANCY IN BITCHES

### Care During Pregnancy

#### How long will she be pregnant for?

The length of pregnancy averages around 63 days or 9 weeks. This can vary as the length of the pregnancy is actually dated from ovulation and not the date of the mating meaning she can whelp at any point from 56-72 days post mating.

#### What changes will I notice if she is pregnant?

There are a number of appearance and behavioural changes that may be noticed during pregnancy, these are:

- Some bitches have a reduced appetite 3-4 weeks after mating, some may also become lethargic around this time for a day or two
- There may be some swelling of the vulva and some mucus discharge visible around 1 month after the mating
- Her weight will increase as will the size of her abdomen from around 5 weeks
- The mammary glands will start to enlarge from around day 40
- Her appetite may reduce towards the end of the pregnancy

#### How can the pregnancy be confirmed by the vet?

- **Examination** - The vet can palpate or feel the abdomen. This is most accurate a month after mating. It also becomes more difficult to feel the pups after 35 days and is difficult in obese or nervous dogs.
- **Ultrasound** - We recommend this takes place 4-5 weeks into the pregnancy as this gives a more accurate result. We can do this during an extended consultation so there is not usually any reason to leave them with us. She will need to have her tummy shaved and some gel applied for the ultrasound. It will not be possible for us to confirm how many puppies there are.



## Diet

She should be fed on a good quality, complete adult food. There is no need to increase her food intake until the later stage of pregnancy, although you may find as the pregnancy progresses that she may need smaller, more frequent meals.

It is advisable to gradually increase her food intake by 5-10% every week for the last 3 weeks. This is the time the puppies do the majority of their growing and will take a lot of the nutrition from mum.

Be careful not to overfeed. Obesity can cause complications during whelping (birth) and may increase the risk of needing a caesarean. The bitches weight gain by the end of the pregnancy should not exceed 30% of her ideal weight in small and medium breeds and 25% in large or giant breeds.

There is no need to give your bitch calcium supplements. A good quality food will be enough. Adding calcium can actually increase the risk of eclampsia (a potentially life threatening condition).

## Exercise

It is fine to continue to exercise your bitch as she was before to avoid excessive weight gain and maintain her fitness levels. You will need to reduce the amount of exercise as she becomes more heavily pregnant.

## Vaccination

This is safe to do during pregnancy and we as a practice are happy to vaccinate if it is needed. It is recommended that all pregnant bitches are fully vaccinated; some immunity will be passed to the puppies at birth.

## Flea and worm treatment

It is important to keep on top of both of these during the pregnancy. Roundworms can be passed across the placenta to the puppies and high flea burdens on new born puppies can cause anaemia.

The products we use routinely, Bravecto and Milbemax, are safe for use during pregnancy. Bravecto should be given every 3 months as usual and the Milbemax should be given monthly to give a better cover against worms.



## Preparing for Birth

**If using a whelping box it should be big enough for your bitch to stretch out allowing her to feed her new born pups once they arrive. Mum and pups should feel safe and secure in the whelping box.**

Your bitch is likely to whelp in an area she feels safe and relaxed. If you want it to happen in a specific place it is a good idea to introduce her to this area a few weeks before the puppies are due, giving her time to get used to it and feel comfortable there. The area should be warm, draught free and possibly contain a whelping box to keep mum and the new puppies safe. Whelping boxes can be either bought or homemade but either way should be secure enough to keep puppies in but allow mum to get out if she needs to. The box or area should be lined with newspaper and towels and you need to be prepared with lots of clean spares.

## Whelping

Parturition is the process of giving birth, and most bitches will go through this without any help from the vet. It is useful to know what happens during a normal labour and when it is best to seek advice from your vet. There are 3 stages to parturition. Stages 2 and 3 will be repeated for each puppy.

### Stage 1

This usually last 6-12 hours but can last up to 24-36 hours. The behaviour of the bitch will change and this and the other signs listed below will warn you that birth is imminent.

- Her rectal temperature will drop to 37°C or below
- She will become uncomfortable and you may see her glancing at her tummy and becoming restless
- She may start panting a lot
- She will start "nesting" which may include tearing up and rearranging bedding
- You may see her shiver
- She may vomit
- Contractions start but there is no straining yet



## Stage 2

Delivery of the puppies. This usually lasts for 3-12 hours, but may last up to 24 hours, depending on the number of puppies.

- Rectal temperature rises back up to normal, around 38°C
- Straining is seen
- Some clear fluid may be seen and this is normal
- Bloody, or a dark green discharge is normal
- Weak infrequent straining should produce a pup within 2 hours
- There is normally 1-2 hours between puppies

## Stage 3

- Delivery of the placenta
- Usually happens within 15 minutes of delivery of each pup
- Two or three puppies may be born before their placenta is delivered
- The bitch may want to eat the placenta

## When to call the vet

- The bitch has had a dark green/red-brown discharge but no pup has been born within **2 hours**
- Clear fluid was passed more than **2-3 hours** ago but nothing more has happened
- She has had weak, irregular straining for more than **2-4 hours** and no pup has been born
- She has had strong, regular straining for more than **20-30 minutes** and no pup has been born
- More than **2-4 hours** have passed since the last puppy was born and you think there are more
- The second stage of labour has gone on for more than **12 hours**
- You have any concerns or questions

**If you see any of the above signs please contact us straight away.**

**We have a vet available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.**