



## **CARING FOR YOUR PREGNANT BITCH, PREPARING FOR WHELPING, AND POST WHELPING CARE**

Confirming pregnancy, and care of your bitch leading up to the birth of her puppies. At first it can be difficult to tell if your bitch is pregnant. There are a number of signs you can look out for, but most are not apparent until the bitch is well into her pregnancy, which on average lasts between 61 & 65 days.

- Teats become more prominent (25-30 days after mating).
- Abdominal enlargement (occurs 45-50 days after mating).
- Behavioural changes, your bitch may seem slightly depressed.

Close to delivery your bitch may start to display nesting behaviour (scratching at bedding/restlessness). The vet can perform an ultrasound scan from day 28. This can reveal if there are puppies but may give an accurate number. The vet can feel the abdomen from about day 21 to see if a bitch is pregnant— this can be made more difficult if the dog is overweight or nervous and tense.

Pregnancy puts a huge stress on the pregnant animal. The body goes under many changes so your bitch will need lots of extra care and attention.

### **Feeding**

As the pregnancy progresses the bitch will require increased amounts of food to nourish her and the puppies. We would recommend starting to increase feeding from about the 6th week of pregnancy. A high energy food such as a Starter puppy food will provide these additional calories. Feeding your bitch little & often, especially in the later stages of pregnancy is recommended due to the lack of room in her tummy! Obesity can be dangerous for the pregnant bitch and may cause problems during the delivery of the puppies so care must be taken to avoid this. Before mating is the best time to take action if your dog is overweight.

### **Immunity**

Whilst we are able to vaccinate dogs during pregnancy, it is far better to make sure your dog is up to date before mating. Healthy mums pass on their immunity to the puppies in the colostrum ('first milk'), so it's good to make sure the antibody levels are at their peak.

## **Flea and worm control**



Roundworm and hookworm can be passed from the bitch to the unborn puppies. We recommend worming your bitch with Milpro Plus before mating. During pregnancy we recommend using Panacur Suspension, this is given by mouth (or in the food), once a day, from day 40 of the pregnancy until 2 days after giving birth. Repeat treatment with Panacur Suspension of the bitch and puppies at 2 weeks post whelping too. We recommend treating your

bitch for fleas prior to mating. There are several products that are safe to use during pregnancy just ask us for advice Exercise Your dog will still need to be walked and kept fit. Short regular walks are better than long strenuous ones.

## **Preparation for the birth (Whelping)**

The bitch will want a warm, safe, and comfortable area to give birth in. You can buy a box or create an enclosed area. This should be in a quiet area where she won't be disturbed. She will need plenty of bedding—blankets and towels are ideal. The ideal room temperature is between 25-30 C for the first few days after the puppies are born. This can be reduced to 22 C, as long as it is draught free.

## **Whelping**

The first thing to remember is:

Try to stay calm, it's a natural process and as long as you have your vet's number to hand, there is no need to panic. Have a supply of clean dry towels and ensure the whelping area is clean, dry, and warm.

## **Signs of Whelping**

In the final week of pregnancy begin taking her rectal temperature. The first noticeable sign of labour is a drop in temperature from 38.5 C to 37 C, (this can differ slightly from dog to dog). This usually occurs 12-24 hours before birth. The bitch may go off her food and may feel nauseous. You may notice contractions; she will tense up and then relax as they pass. She may become very restless and unsettled and may pant/shiver. Discharge from the vagina. This will be clear to start with changing to a pale then dark green. This green discharge is the placentas becoming detached and the puppies are imminent. If no puppies are born within an hour of this green discharge, contact the vet for advice. The puppies are normally delivered 20-60 minutes apart. The bitch may have a rest part way through, not straining and not passing any puppies.

If you notice the bitch straining hard, appearing unsettled and restless for over an hour, or taking more than a 2-hour break contact the vet. As the puppies are born the bitch will lick and clear the sac away from the face allowing the puppy to breathe. She will also bite through the umbilical cord. If she is having puppies for the first time, she may need a little help and reassurance. You may need to remove the membrane from around the puppies faces. Using a towel rub the puppy, this can be done quite vigorously but take care not to hurt the puppy. This rubbing will stimulate the puppy to breath, fluid may be expelled from the puppies' noses so clear this with the towel

too. After the puppies are born encourage the bitch to eat and drink. She may need to be encouraged to visit the garden to go to the toilet. Remove the soiled bedding and replace with clean. Now is the time to observe the puppies and bitch.

### **Post whelping – caring for mum and her puppies**

She should be calm, comfortable, and relaxed once all the puppies are born. She should be cleaning the puppies and allowing them to suckle. In the first few weeks the bitch will provide all the care her puppies need, providing the environment they are kept in is kept clean, warm, and dry. The bedding material needs to be easily washed and dried. The bitch will lick the puppy's bottoms to stimulate urination and defaecation. She will do this until the puppies are approximately 3 weeks old. It is useful to weigh the puppies every day. They should be gaining weight every day. Keep a written record of each puppy's weight so that it can be monitored accurately. (As a rough rule they should gain their birth weight every week during the nursing phase). It is likely that your bitch will develop diarrhoea if she has eaten the placentas as the puppies were born, this should settle down within a couple of days

Your bitch will spend much of her time with her puppies during the first 2 weeks but should be encouraged to visit the garden to stretch her legs and go to the toilet.

Worming with Panacur Suspension needs to be repeated when the puppies are 2 weeks old. Both mum and puppies need to be treated at this stage. The puppies need repeat treatments at 5 weeks and again at 8 weeks. Having accurate weights will make dosing much easier.



The amount of food fed to your bitch during the nursing stage may need to be increased by three times the amount. A good food during lactation is biscuits from the Virbac baby range, you can also try introducing small amounts to the puppies from about 3 weeks. The biscuits can be soaked in a small amount of warm water initially to make them easier for the puppies to eat. Gradually increase the amount of biscuit feeds over the next 3 weeks. By the age of 6 weeks, they should be completely weaned from your bitch.

We can supply suitable diets, & advise on flea and worm treatment, just give us a call.

**Hill Top Vets**

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