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## **Whelping**

### **Feeding your mum to be:**

A good quality adult maintenance diet should be fed for the first 6 weeks of pregnancy. Three quarters of the puppies growth happens in the last 3 weeks of pregnancy so during this period the food requirement increases by about 25%. You can either feed more of the usual diet or give a smaller amount of puppy food which is higher in calories. The womb takes up a lot of space in the abdomen so it is better to give more frequent small meals.

Once your bitch starts lactating her energy requirement will double. In order to satisfy this, feed her a good quality puppy food as much and as often as she likes until the pups are weaned.

### **Worming:**

It is essential to worm your bitch during pregnancy as any larvae can cross the placenta and infect the puppies. We can advise you on a suitable worming regime for your bitch. The puppies also need to be wormed at 2, 5 and 8 weeks old. We can help you to calculate the dose they require based on their weight at the time.

### **Your preparations for the birth:**

You need to prepare a whelping box that is situated in a warm quiet but accessible room. The box needs to be comfortable and in a place that your bitch feels safe. It should have raised sides to prevent drafts and be of sufficient size to accommodate mum and her pups until about 8 weeks old. One side of the box should have a lower wall to allow mum access in and out without knocking herself but still be high enough to stop escapees. The box should be raised slightly above the ground to aid insulation. Whelping is a messy process and then after that the puppies will make lots of mess of their own so it is essential to ensure that the box can be kept clean. You should introduce your bitch to the box before whelping by putting familiar bedding in it and feeding her in it. Then hopefully she will feel comfortable there.

### **Preparing to give birth:**

Pregnancy lasts 63 days in the bitch but whelping can occur 4 days either side of this without causing a problem. Development of the mammary glands can occur as early as 4 weeks into pregnancy (especially in 1<sup>st</sup> time mums). Some bitches will even start to produce milk 2 weeks before the pups are due, whilst other bitches won't produce milk until whelping is underway. In the last week of pregnancy the vulva will become enlarged and flabby and there may be some clear discharge. The bitch's temperature will often drop by up to 1°C 24 hours prior to the birth but this is not always reliable.

### **1<sup>st</sup> stage labour:**

Your bitch will be restless and display nesting behaviour. She may paw, shiver, pant or watch her flank. These signs will gradually increase in intensity. This 1<sup>st</sup> stage of labour may last anything between 4 and 24 hours.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> stage labour:**

This is when your bitch will start straining, using her abdominal muscles to push out her puppies. She will probably lie on her side for this stage but may walk around pausing to squat and strain. The puppies are born in a thin bag which your bitch should open by licking and ripping at it, she will then sever the umbilical cord about 2cm from the pup by herself. The first puppy is usually born within 1-2 hours of abdominal straining. The remainder of the litter is usually born at 5 to 60 minute intervals but may be longer with the last of the litter. Occasionally long pauses of up to 4 hours occur during the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage. If there is a pause in labour your bitch should be calm and feeding her pups, this can extend the duration of 2<sup>nd</sup> stage labour even up to 24 hours. During delivery a dark green discharge is normally seen.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> stage labour:**

This is when the placenta is passed and can be after each puppy, after 1 or 2 puppies or after the whole litter has been born. The bitch will usually want to eat the placenta.

### **Signs of potential problems:**

Observation of whelping should be careful but discreet. Too much interference can upset an inexperienced or nervous mother and result in her moving to whelp elsewhere, not bonding with all or some of her litter or even hurting the puppies. You should be monitoring to ensure that your bitch is progressing through labour in the manner discussed above. Each puppy should be watched to ensure that it starts to breathe and then is able to suck a short time later.

Advice should be sought in the following circumstances:

- Gestation is prolonged beyond the expected whelping date.
- Your bitch is making prolonged preparations to whelp but is not progressing.
- Intense and distressing straining for more than 30 minutes with no sign of a puppy.
- Weak and intermittent straining for more than 2 hours with no sign of a puppy.
- A puppy visible and stuck in the vagina.
- Green discharge from the vulva with no pups.
- Whelping seems to stop but it is suspected or known that there are still pups left to be born.
- Signs of illness in your bitch such as a lot of vomiting, distress or blood loss.

If in doubt give us a call on 01442 833 198 and we will be happy to help.

### **Your new puppies:**

Puppies are quite poorly developed at birth and they require warmth and regular feeding. They should be suckling within 1 hour of birth. The litter should be weighed every few days to ensure they are continually gaining weight. Large litters may require supplementary feeding ('Whelpi' is a special dog milk that can be bottle fed). Mum should keep her litter clean but you will need to change the bedding regularly. The puppies eyes won't open until they are about 10 days old. Your puppies will usually start to eat their mother's food at about 3-4 weeks old. They should be weaned onto a good quality puppy food by about 6 weeks old.

# Enjoy your new puppies!