



Lilydale Clinic
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THE CARE OF PREGNANT AND WHELPING BITCHES.

Pregnancy and birth are natural functions and usually proceed uneventfully in all animals. Only a little extra is needed to maximise her chances for a normal birth and healthy puppies.

PREGNANCY

Pregnancy in the bitch usually lasts about 60 to 65 days, or 9 weeks.

During the first half of pregnancy the bitch should receive her normal diet, but after 5 weeks there should be a gradual increase in the quantity of her diet. The additional food required may be as much as 3 to 4 times the maintenance requirement of the same animal. The diet should be balanced, digestible, and appetising and should be given 3 – 4 times per day. There should be a plentiful supply of fresh water.

From the 60th day of pregnancy it is advisable to take the bitch's temperature twice daily at the same time each day. The bitch's normal temperature is 38.5°C and this will drop by about 1°C just before whelping commences. The first pup can be expected within 24 hours of the temperature drop.

It is important to keep the bitch exercising moderately but regularly during pregnancy. Fat, unfit bitches can run into problems.

The bitch should not be wormed during pregnancy. Worming should be done before she is mated and then again when the pups are wormed. Her vaccinations should be up to date before she is mated. We do not advise any vaccinations during pregnancy.

WHELPING

Prepare a whelping area about 2 – 3 weeks before the pups are due, so that the bitch can get accustomed to sleeping in it. This can be her normal bed or a large box as long as the bitch has enough room to lie down and tend to the pups. The area should be warm, dry and draft free. Use bedding that can be easily cleaned or thrown out; newspaper is suitable for this purpose. The desirable temperature of a whelping area is 26°C.

Early signs of first-stage labour include loss of appetite or poor appetite. Many bitches will seek a place to hide and seclude themselves. Some will build a nest with the newspaper or other bedding and rearrange it by pushing it around with their noses. This stage may last for hours.

The next aspect of first-stage labour involves slowly but steadily increasing discomfort. The bitch will rest at intervals and then pant, move around, change position, perhaps lie on her side and generally appear uneasy.

Second-stage labour is when the pups are delivered. She will appear to push, possibly groan or grunt or make no noise at all. This stage requires obvious effort on the part of the bitch and if many pups are present she may become exhausted.

The labour contractions at first are observed at intervals of ten or more minutes then usually come in waves of three to five contractions followed by a rest.



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When the puppy is presented at the vulva the bitch normally begins to lick the area intensively to help break the membrane. A clear liquid will appear once the membrane or bag that surrounds the puppy is broken. This can also be present before the pup is presented and if the bitch continues to strain for an hour without a puppy being presented then a vet should check her. Once the pup is expelled the bitch breaks the membrane with her teeth and licks the newborn to stimulate the pups breathing. It is normal for the bitch to eat the membranes and afterbirth. There should be one afterbirth passed for each pup. At the same time the bitch will chew through the umbilical cords. A small amount of bleeding under these situations is normal.

The intervals between pups can vary from a few minutes to several hours. The average would be about thirty minutes. The bitch may rest between delivery of each pup. If the bitch has been straining for one hour without producing a pup then she should be seen by a Veterinarian.

After the final pup has been delivered the bitch should seem more relaxed, more comfortable, and usually very tired. She could be offered a warm drink of milk, egg and 1 teaspoon of glucose powder.

When the bitch and pups have had several hours together they should be checked by your Veterinarian to ensure that the bitch has no more pups or afterbirths inside her uterus. She may be given injections to ensure complete contraction of the uterus and to minimise post-partum infections.

THE PUPS

Newborn pups cannot control their body temperature so it is vital that they are kept warm and dry. The bitch will normally look after this but if the pups seem to be having problems, a hot water bottle, wrapped in a towel so as not to burn them, can be used. The pups should be kept in an environment of 26°C.

It is important that the pups be allowed to suckle undisturbed for the first six to twelve hours, as it is during this time that they acquire their antibodies against disease from their mother's first milk or colostrum. The bitch will be very reluctant to leave the whelping box even to relieve herself and may even have to be fed in the whelping box at first.

Worming treatment should be started when the pups are two weeks old and then continued at two weekly intervals. First vaccinations are given when the pups are six weeks old and receive booster vaccinations at ten and fourteen weeks of age.

WHEN TO CALL YOUR VETERINARIAN.

- A green discharge and no pups presented in 30 minutes.
- The bitch is contracting for about two hours with no pups delivered.
- More than two hours between pups.
- Pup gets stuck in vagina.
- Has not started whelping after 66 days of pregnancy.
- Obvious discharge that smells offensive or the bitch does not eat within 24 hours.
- Mother rejects puppies.
- Puppies do not suckle soon after birth.