

# What to expect when your pet is expecting

## PREGNANCY

Pregnancy in dogs lasts approximately 58-72 days (average 63) when counting the days from the first mating. Pregnancy lasting longer than 68 days is cause for concern. The best way to narrow down the expected due date is to work closely with your veterinarian during breeding and pregnancy. Contact your veterinarian if it has been more than 7 days past the expected due date with no signs of impending labour.

Knowing how many puppies to expect can be lifesaving for the mum and very helpful for you when it's the middle of the night. The most accurate method for counting puppies is to have your veterinarian take an x-ray – this can be done after the 42nd day of pregnancy when the bones have formed.

## WHELPING (GIVING BIRTH)

When signs of whelping are first noticed, the expectant mother should be left alone no matter how anxious or restless she seems. The 1st stage of labour can last 48 hours and is characterized by nesting behaviour, shredding bedding, hiding, panting, vomiting, restlessness, shivering and anorexia. Her rectal temperature may drop to 37-38 degrees during this time. Undue fussing and handling of your pet at this stage can delay the labour and make whelping more difficult. Do not interfere with the whelping process unless you truly believe something has gone wrong, but keep close watch even if puppies are delivered normally.

The 2nd and 3rd stages of labour occur together as active contractions help expel the puppies and placentas. Uterine contractions are assisted by the mother visibly straining her abdominal muscles. This continues until a fluid-filled sac appears at the vulva containing a puppy. Note that both face first and breech position (hind legs first) are normal in dogs.

The sac will then burst or be opened by the mother and a pup and the placenta should appear shortly afterwards. The placenta can be accompanied by green to black discharge (lochia). An experienced mother will break the sac covering each pup and lick the pups clean. She will also bite off the umbilical cord and eat the placenta and afterbirth. Be prepared to assist if necessary, but don't interfere unless you need to.

## WHEN TO ASSIST

If the mother does not take the initiative, remove all the covering membranes from the pup, clean its face, and remove any secretions from the mouth and nose to help it breathe. The umbilical cord can then be tied off with cotton 4 -5cm from the pup's body and cut on the mother's side of the tie. The remaining part of the umbilical cord will dry up and fall off. When each puppy begins to squirm and cry on its own, place it close to the mother so it can receive warmth and mothering and begin sucking. After this the puppy and mother should not be disturbed.



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If a puppy becomes lodged at the vulva, immediate assistance is necessary. Remove all membranes away from the pup's face (if presenting face first). With a clean towel grasp the puppy and pull gently but steadily in an outward and downward direction. Do not use force and do not insert anything into the birth canal. If the pup cannot be removed within 5 mins contact a veterinarian immediately.

If a newborn puppy appears cold and weak or is not breathing, clear all secretions away from the nose and mouth, hold the puppy in one hand, and briskly rub the pup along its back with a warm towel making sure the puppies head is pointing downward to help clear secretions. When it is squirming and noisy, it can be placed back with its mother, but should be watched to ensure it continues to thrive.

## WHEN TO GET VETERINARY HELP

- Green discharge more than 10 minutes prior to the first puppy (after this it is normal)
- More than 30 minutes of active straining with no pup produced
- More than 2 hours between pups and weak, infrequent, or absent contractions
- Fluid filled sac visible for more than 15 mins with no progression
- Abnormal vulvar discharge (foul smelling, excessively bloody)
- If all pups have not been delivered within 12-18 hours
- If at any time you feel the mother is unwell or in excessive pain

## CAESAREAN SECTIONS

If there is no obstruction and puppies and mum are healthy and not distressed, your veterinarian may decide medical treatment is an option. Otherwise, surgery may be needed. A Caesarean section (C-section) is a surgery that allows direct removal of the puppies from the uterus while mum is under anaesthesia. Sometimes a C-section must be done to save the puppies if one becomes stuck in the birth canal and should be done as quickly as possible for the best chance to help both mother and puppies. 2/3rds of all dogs that need to come to an emergency hospital for difficulty giving birth will need a C-section.

## POSTPARTUM CARE

Once whelping is over, you can expect the puppies to begin feeding and be warm and lively. All puppies and mum should see a veterinarian within 48 hours so that they can be checked over. Small amounts of bloody or greenish-black vaginal discharge are normal for up to 5-7 days, but contact your veterinarian if the discharge is foul smelling or copious.

While the bitch is feeding puppies, she may require double the normal amounts of food divided into at least 3 feeds per day of a good quality puppy food. Be guided by her appetite and body weight. She may also require a calcium supplement when feeding pups. Please discuss this with your veterinarian.

