

Care of the Pregnant Bitch

Feeding – feed the bitch her normal diet until 5 weeks into pregnancy then, over about a week, change the bitch onto a complete puppy food by mixing in increasing amounts of puppy food into decreasing amounts of her normal diet. At this stage do not increase her portion size. The puppy food is more energy dense so will help her take in enough energy during lactation when her energy requirements increase a lot.

From 6 weeks of pregnancy start to increase her food intake a very small amount each week, so that meal sizes are up to a third bigger than her normal amount by her due date. Do not allow her to become obese.

Worming – worm with Panacur granules or liquid daily from 40 days of pregnancy until 2 days after whelping.

Behaviour – In the later stages of pregnancy she will become less active and may occasionally pant. Exercise is still good.

Whelping quarters – construct these to allow plenty of room for movement. Use newspapers or vetbedding as floor covering, not straw. Surround the area by a border to allow the bitch out but not the litter. Encourage her to spend time in the whelping quarters as whelping approaches.

Whelping – 12-24 hours before whelping she may become reclusive, restless and will probably not eat. She will start to pant and her temperature will drop. She may start to make a nest and carry toys around.

At the onset of whelping a clear or blood stained discharge will be noticed as membranes break, this is normal. The bitch will start to contract and these contractions will become more forceful.

The puppies will be born singly, and may be wrapped in a membrane. If the bitch is cleaning them herself then leave them alone, if not clear the membranes from the nose and mouth to **clear the airway**. The membrane may come after the puppy. Count the numbers of membranes passed – they should equal the number of puppies.

Discourage her from eating too much of the membranes as it can cause diarrhoea. The gap between pups can vary from 15 minutes to 3 or 4 hours especially towards the end.

Seek advice immediately if

- The bitch has strained constantly for 30 minutes without producing a pup
- Intermittent straining has not produced a pup for 2 hours
- A green discharge occurs
- A delay of 4 hours occurs without straining but another pup is expected

Post-Whelping Care

Feeding – increase to 3 meals daily. Continue to increase the total daily food intake every week to twice her normal (non-pregnant) food portions at 2 weeks after whelping, to 3 times her normal food portions at 3 weeks (peak lactation). With large litters she will need 4 meals daily or ad lib food at this time to allow for small amounts of food often.

If you feel the pups are not getting enough milk then ask about extra feeding with a milk substitute (Whelpi). Introduce the pups to solid food from 3-4 weeks of age. As their milk intake reduces, reduce the bitch's food intake accordingly.

Eclampsia (hypocalcaemia) – this is a serious condition that most often occurs in small breeds with large litters. It causes shivering, restlessness, panting, incoordination and can cause seizures. Seek veterinary advice immediately if you have concerns about your bitch.

Worming – Worm the pups and bitch at 2, 5 and 8 weeks of age. Suitable treatments will depend on body weight.

Flea treatments – continue the bitch's flea treatments as normal throughout pregnancy and lactation. Pups can be treated once a few weeks old, though body weight will determine suitable treatments.