



# Maidstone Veterinary Clinic

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## BREEDING PUPPIES

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The normal length of pregnancy in the bitch is 63 days from conception, with most bitches delivering within a couple of days either side of this time. It is important to make note of the mating date so that you are prepared for the puppies arrival and know exactly when they are due.

Bitches need a balanced (preferably commercially prepared) diet throughout pregnancy. In the last 2 weeks of pregnancy feed a puppy diet with an increase of around 20% in amount fed. Do not supplement with calcium before whelping as this increases the risk of eclampsia (see later). Bitches should be wormed with an all-wormer 10 days before whelping. Check the label to ensure the wormer chosen is recommended for use in pregnant bitches.

Ensure the bitch has a suitable area in which to whelp. It should be warm and draft free, be easy to clean, confine pups but allow freedom for the bitch and be in a quiet location.

### The Whelping Process

Whelping is a continuous process but three stages are seen.

#### FIRST STAGE

This is the preparatory stage characterised by nervousness, lack of appetite and possibly shivering, vomiting and panting. During this stage the first pup is moving towards the birth canal. It may last anywhere from 2-12 hours and is usually characterised by a constant one degree drop in the bitches body temperature (to around 37.5C).

#### SECOND STAGE

This is when active labour occurs and the bitch will be seen to have flank contractions and straining.

Expulsion of the first pup may take up to one hour with a variable time between each pup thereafter. The average time for the whole second stage is 3 - 6 hours depending on the number of pups born, and 12 hours would certainly be the maximum.

Each pup is born with its own placenta attached via an umbilical cord and a variable amount of blood and dark green discharge which is normal.

The bitch will usually remove the placenta and sever the cord then vigorously clean the pup. Often the placenta does not appear with the pup but will be expelled shortly after, at which time the bitch will eat it. If the litter is large it is best to limit placental consumption to two or three as too many may cause vomiting and diarrhoea in the bitch.

It is normal for the bitch to rest between each pup and feeding of the pups should be encouraged during this time.

#### THIRD STAGE

During this stage, which partially overlaps the second stage, remaining placentas will be expelled and the uterus or 'womb' will shrink back to its normal size. The discharge will reduce in quantity and change from an initial dark green to red-brown one week after whelping to a clear mucous two weeks later.

You may notice short increases in discharge with suckling by the pups due to hormone release which encourages contractions of the uterus.

### **When to Intervene/ Seek Advice**

- If the bitch does not produce a pup within 40-60 minutes of active labour or if a pup can be seen but appears unable to be passed. Attempt gentle traction using a damp cloth but seek vet advice if at all concerned.
- If the bitch does not start labour after day 67 of pregnancy.
- If the bitch does not progress to second stage labour after 12-24 hours in first stage.
- If the bitch is not progressing in any stage of the labour or you are not happy or unsure as to what is happening.
- If the bitch discharges fresh blood for more than 10 minutes after birthing a pup.
- If you are concerned that the bitch has retained pups after labour has ceased.
- If the post whelping discharge appears to contain pus.
- If the bitch refuses to feed the pups or seems uncomfortable doing so.

### **Post Whelping Check**

Post whelping examination of the bitch and puppies are not essential in healthy animals but are a good precaution to assess the health of the bitch and pups and check for any abnormalities. At this visit the uterus will be palpated to ensure it is empty and an injection can be given to encourage the 'shrinking' of the uterus back to normal size and expulsion of any fluid/blood left over from the birth process.

### **Post Whelping Care**

As young puppies and kittens are not good at maintaining a constant body temperature they very quickly lose body heat if chilled. For this reason they need warm, clean and draft free surroundings, particularly if the litter is small. Supplemental heating in the form of heat pads and lights may be used if necessary. The environmental temperature in the first week of life should be 25 to 30 C and gradually reduced to 20 C at 3 - 4 weeks of age. It is important to maintain an even temperature and not to overheat them causing excessive dehydration. Bedding can consist of old towels, clothes or clean paper material. This should be changed at least daily and more frequently as the puppies get older.

Continue to feed the bitch a high quality puppy food during lactation as she will have greatly increased energy requirements. If not provided with sufficient food excessive weight loss will occur and failure to provide adequate calcium levels will increase the chance of the bitch suffering from eclampsia.

Eclampsia usually occurs around 1-3 weeks post whelping and is seen initially as restlessness, shivering and panting progressing to full seizures which are rapidly fatal. This is a serious condition and veterinary care is required immediately. If the bitch is on a good puppy food calcium supplementation should not be required but check with your vet if concerned.

The bitch should be given an all-wormer two weeks after birthing, and the puppies wormed every fortnight from 2 weeks of age until 3 months old.