

Whelping your first litter

Pregnancy:

- 🐾 Note the date when your bitch was first mated. Use this to calculate the first possible due date. The first possible due date is 9 weeks after the first date she was mated. Pregnancy in dogs usually lasts around 63 days (but can vary from 57-71 days).
- 🐾 For the first 5-6 weeks of pregnancy, there is no need to change anything about your bitch's feeding or exercise regime.
- 🐾 After the start of week 6, you need to steadily increase her food so that by the time she gives birth she is eating one and a half times her normal intake in 3-4 small meals per day.
- 🐾 From week 6 onwards, have the place where you want her to have babies ready and get her used to sleeping in this area and spending time there so that she feels relaxed and happy to be there when giving birth.
- 🐾 Bedding should be either washable or disposable as whelping is never a clean procedure. Not much-loved blankets or toys unless they can be washed after she has given birth.
- 🐾 Make sure that you know how to contact us in an emergency if whelping does not go as smoothly as you expect.

Signs your bitch is due to whelp:

- 🐾 24-48 hours before giving birth, many bitches start to nest, tearing up newspaper and bedding, become restless, pant and eat less.
- 🐾 Usually 1-3 days before giving birth, she will start to produce milk - although sometimes this can happen up to a week prior to whelping.
- 🐾 Just before contractions start, many bitches pass a little clear mucus.
- 🐾 When she reaches the stage of giving birth, you will see abdominal contractions and she will start to push to get the baby out.

Be sure to have these items on hand, so that you're ready for when the birth begins:

- 🐾 A safe place for the babies to be while mum gives birth to the rest of the litter e.g. a basket or a large cardboard box lined with blankets and with a heating pad or hot water bottle in the bottom to keep them warm. Test the temperature of any heating device against the inside of your forearm. It should feel neither hot nor cold. Do not use it without testing the temperature first.
- 🐾 A suitable milk substitute for pups e.g., Welpi; Lactol, and a feeding bottle in case not enough milk is produced to feed the pups. Never use cows' milk to feed pups. It does not contain enough nutrients and they will starve.
- 🐾 Towels to dry off the pups if mum does not do this herself.
- 🐾 Mild disinfectant e.g. Milton to clean the whelping area and any baby bottles. clean
- 🐾 Scales to weigh each puppy. You need to weigh them shortly after birth then daily. They should double in weight in the first week.

During birth:

- 🐾 Puppies are born inside a thin sac, which the mother will remove, enabling them to breathe. Most puppies are born headfirst but some come tail first.
- 🐾 After each puppy, your dog should pass an afterbirth (placenta). Some pups share a placenta so do not worry if not every pup has one born after it.
- 🐾 The bitch will often eat the placenta. This is not always a good idea. Placentas are very rich and can give her diarrhoea so consider taking the placentas away and disposing of them after each one is passed.
- 🐾 Between each puppy, your dog should seem comfortable and happily settled with her new-born until her contractions restart. Many bitches rest for up to half an hour before giving birth to the next pup.
- 🐾 There will be some dark green or black fluid coming from your dog's vulva during whelping. This is normal. It will continue for up to 4 weeks after birth.

Signs to look out for that your bitch may need help from a vet:

- 🐾 If she has had contractions for over an hour without a puppy being born.
- 🐾 If she still appears to be pregnant and hasn't started to give birth to the next baby within an hour of passing the last placenta. Remember some bitches may only have one pup in a litter.
- 🐾 If you notice a green/ black discharge but no babies have been born. This is an emergency as it means the placentas are separating from the lining of the womb without the babies being born.
- 🐾 If she hasn't shown any signs of going into labour 70-72 days after the first due date.
- 🐾 If in doubt, please contact us on [01472 347054](tel:01472347054). Outside normal consulting hours, please have a pen and paper ready because you will get a message telling you the number to call of the vet on duty so you can ask their advice.

After whelping:

- 🐾 Once mum has finished giving birth, she should be settled and happy. If she continues to pant and appears uncomfortable, this may be a sign that she has not finished giving birth. If this seems to be the case, please call us for advice on [01472 347054](tel:01472347054).
- 🐾 Make sure that all the pups have broken their umbilical cords and the placentas are detached. If this has not happened, you can cut the cords about 1cm from the babies' bellies. There is no need to tie the cord before doing this.
- 🐾 Check each pup to make sure that they all have normal lips, no cleft palate (split in the roof of the mouth) and an anus. Pups are occasionally born with deformities in these areas and usually cannot survive if these problems are present. If you are concerned, please call us for advice on [01472 347054](tel:01472347054).
- 🐾 Make sure that all pups have latched onto a teat and fed. If they have not, you must hold them against the teats and put it into their mouths. They should then start to suck.
- 🐾 Remember happy pups are sleepy and quiet. Cold or underfed pups are whingey and crawl about seeking food and warmth. If the pups seem agitated, you need to check that enough milk to feed them is being produced and that they are staying close enough to the bitch to stay warm.

- 🐾 Make sure that the bitch is happy to accept the pups. If she is, she will lick them clean and curl round them as they lie against her and feed. If she is not, you may need to take over some pup care for her. Please call us for advice on [01472 347054](tel:01472347054).

Once your puppies arrive

Week 1-2

Pups should be inspected and weighed daily. Weights should double in their first week. Weight loss, wheezing, abnormal discharges are all major causes for concern. Any causes for concern should be discussed with your vet.

After 10 days, the puppies' eyes start to open and the pups can see movement, although they may not notice stationary objects. Puppies also start to hear what is going on around them.

Depending on the size of the litter, you need to start increasing what mum is eating to cope with the demands of milk production. By the 4th week after birth, when the pups are making most demands on her, a bitch with an average litter should be eating up to 4x her pre-pregnancy food intake in several small meals.

Bitches of large breeds or those with large litters may benefit from Calcium supplements. Colloidal Calcium e.g. Collo-cal D is better than Calcium tablets because it is absorbed better by the bowel.

Week 3

This is the first week of socialisation and habituation. Hearing and vision are now fully developed, so it is a good time to introduce the sights and sounds of family life. Anything they see or hear now will be accepted as normal.

In this week, the pups also starting to learn about their social group. They learn to recognise their mother, littermates and humans as being part of their family too. This is when they start the bonding process.

- 🐾 Introduce as many sounds as possible to the litter. Vacuuming, traffic sounds, children playing and T.V. are all good noises to accustom pups to hearing.
- 🐾 Let them explore beyond the whelping area so their world expands.
- 🐾 Handle, cuddle and pick up the puppies regularly, making sure they are being held in a comfortable position and kept fully supported.
- 🐾 Introduce new people so that pups learn to accept different humans in their social group.

Week 4

This is a good week to start weaning.

- 🐾 Start by introducing very mushy food. This can be puppy food mashed in puppy milk on a flat dish or tray. Take mum for a walk when you offer the pups food.

She will usually be very hungry at this time, and you need to give the pups chance to learn to eat without her eating it all first. She can eat what is left.

- 🐾 Pups will usually walk through the food and generally make a mess but, after a few feeds, they will start to get the message especially if you give what is left to Mum and they see her eating the leftovers.
- 🐾 When they start to eat a bit, make the food less and less mushy until by the 6th week they are eating solid puppy food happily. Some pups will get the message and wean faster than others.
- 🐾 Keep checking their weights to ensure all are getting enough either from food or from mum's milk.
- 🐾 To encourage good socialisation, spend more time with each puppy individually. Slowly increase the time they spend away from their littermates and their mother. This will help to develop independence and will encourage bonding with humans.
- 🐾 Add safe toys for the puppies can begin to experiment with e.g., tug toys, kongs, tunnels etc.
- 🐾 Allow your puppies to visit new environments e.g., the garden/patio. Always do this under supervision to avoid any accidents

Weeks 5-7

This is when puppies are at their most curious and willing to approach people, but at the same time their natural fearfulness starts to be shaped by their environment.

- 🐾 Put more interactive toys into the puppy pen at times when you can supervise.
- 🐾 Once the puppies are eating solid foods happily, feed them from different bowls – plastic, metal, from your hand etc.
- 🐾 Over the next couple of weeks, try and make sure the puppy meets as many different people as possible.
- 🐾 This is a good time to worm and deflea both mum and puppies.

Week 8

For most puppies, week eight will be their last week before going off to their new human family. The puppies are now old enough to receive their first vaccination, as well as a microchip.

Before the puppies go to their new home:

Prepare an information pack for the new owners. This should contain microchip and vaccination details, registration document, sale contract, feeding and health information, such as when and with what the pups have been wormed and defleaed. Puppies need to be wormed every month up until 6 months of age and will require their second vaccination 2-4 weeks after their first vaccination.