



Preparing your dog to have puppies

Prior to breeding:

- Ensure the bitch is up-to-date with all vaccinations and parasite control e.g. heartworm
- Wait until the bitch's second season &/or until she is at least 18 months old, preferably 2 years in larger breeds
- Find a suitable mate i.e. dog of a similar size (smaller is preferable for the first litter)
- THINK if you can afford to breed e.g. caesarian section, price of microchipping, vaccinating and feeding puppies until they can be sold

At mating:

- The bitch will enter 'standing heat' on average 9 days after starting to bleed
- For the best chance of success the bitch should be mated every second day while she will stand for the dog, where access to the stud is limited mating on day 11 and day 13 is recommended

During pregnancy:

- Do not change the diet of the bitch until the 5th week of the pregnancy, every week after that it can be increased by 10%
- Calcium supplementation is not required if you are feeding a nutritionally balanced diet, and can cause problems if fed during the pregnancy
- Pregnancy can last between 57-71 days, but normally lasts for ~64 days
- The whelping box should be made available at least 2 weeks prior to the due date. It is a box/basket large enough that the bitch can stretch out in and walls high enough that the puppies can escape but mum can. It should be lined with towels, etc to make a comfortable warm environment
- Mammary (breast) tissue will start to swell 1-2 weeks prior to birth, with milk available 24hrs before

At birth:

- The bitch will start to nest, become restless, may not eat and want to be alone as she approaches birth
- Once the cervix dilates and contractions start puppies should be born roughly every 30-60 minutes until finished, the after-birth follows each puppy and the mum will generally eat this and chew off the umbilical cord
- It is best to leave the dog in peace when in labour, but just observe frequently to check for problems (i.e. don't have the whole family crowding around trying to watch – just like we don't like an audience when we give birth, neither do dogs!)

When to call the vet:

- If green discharge is seen without a puppy following within 1-2 hrs (a certain amount of the discharge is normal during birth, so long as it isn't smelly)
- Strong straining without a puppy produced in 30 minutes
- More than 4 hours since the last puppy was born (may have had all the puppies)
- Weak straining without a puppy produced in 2 hrs
- Bitch in obvious pain e.g. crying, licking, biting vulva
- Overdue more than 68 days after breeding
- Any foul smelling, bloody discharge
- Presence of clear fluids or clear fluid-filled bubble from vulva without a puppy produced within 1-2 hours

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After birth:

- Feed the bitch puppy food as it will have the correct level of nutrients to be passed through the milk to the puppies
- Ensure all puppies are feeding on teats (may need to bottle feed if not enough teats for the puppies in big litters)
- It is normal to have some bloody discharge for the first few days after birth

When to call the vet:

- If foul-smelling discharge is noticed from the bitch
- Mammary glands are hot, painful and full; the milk is an off-colour
- If the bitch is very restless, hot, panting, whining, and stiff to move

Care of the new puppies:

- Puppies should be wormed every 2 weeks from birth until they are 12 weeks old
- Ensure that they have no fleas or ticks (Frontline spray can be used safely from 2 days of age if there are problems)
- Weaning can start from 5 weeks of age. Use softened balanced puppy food (do not use weetbix, etc – this is not a balanced diet for a puppy!). Puppy milk is not necessary as they get that from their mother. Puppies should be fed 4 times a day
- Puppies can be re-homed from 6 weeks, although it is better to wait until they are 8 weeks old so they are a bit more developed
- NSW law requires that all dogs are microchipped before they are sold
- It is recommended that the puppies receive their first vaccination before going to a new home so they have some protection against diseases that can kill, such as Parvovirus

