

Care of the Whelping Bitch

Pre-Whelping

- **FEEDING**— It is important that a pregnant bitch maintains her condition well throughout the entire gestation period. A **high quality complete** puppy food can provide the added nutrients and highly digestible formula needed for the increased demands on the bitch. After about 3-4 weeks of gestation, this puppy food can be introduced gradually (over a period of 5 days) into the diet and the amount of total food consumption increased until by week 9 (around whelping) she is eating around a third more than normal. Feeding **several meals** throughout the day will help spread out food consumption and the amount given will depend on the manufacturers guidelines for that particular food.
- **WORMING**— Ideally, a bitch will be wormed **daily from day 40** of pregnancy up to the 2nd day following whelping. The round worm *toxocara canis* will infect all pregnant bitches and their offspring so worming is vital for the puppies. The best wormer for pregnant bitches is fenbendazole (Panacur).

The Stages of Whelping

- Several days prior to whelping, a bitch may act restless and behave abnormally including nesting, or being more attentive and she may refuse food.
- **STAGE ONE**— Uterine contractions begin in this first stage. She may pant, shiver, even vomit and this stage can last between 6 and 12 hours.
- **STAGE TWO**—Abdominal straining begins. Foetal fluids are then passed and a puppy is expelled. The time between each pup can be between 5 and 120 minutes . ANY straining of the bitch with no pup being produced in 2 hours requires veterinary attention. If foetal membranes have been passed and no pup has been expelled in 2-3 hours then you must contact your vets.
- If your bitch appears to be in significant pain or a puppy appears to be stuck in the birth canal please contact us.
- **STAGE THREE**—Expulsion of placenta (usually follows each pup but not always).
- The puppies will be covered in a thin membrane which is normally licked and chewed away by the mother. If this doesn't happen then gently clean away the membrane and dry the pups.
- If in any doubt please contact your vet.

Post-Whelping

- Signs such as restlessness or nervousness in a bitch after whelping should be investigated as she may have low blood calcium levels.
- Infection of the uterus / womb (metritis) or mammary tissue (mastitis) can happen and require treatment.
- Puppies and bitch should be **wormed at 2, 5 and 8 weeks** following whelping.
- As soon as the bitch has had her puppies it is important to increase her food gradually over 4 weeks due to the huge increased demands on her body . By week 3 she should be eating 300% of her normal portion size.
- Once the puppies start eating solid food at around 4 weeks, and gradually wean, the bitch's intake can be gradually reduced back towards normal.