**Whelping**

 Whelping can be a very stressful time, especially if it is the first time for both you and your dog. Outlined below are some important points to take into considering when preparing both yourself and the dog for imminent arrivals. The most important point to note is that if you are at all worried at any point then give us a call and we can advise you how best to proceed.

**Gestation length: 9 weeks (63 days)**

Due to the intricacies of how bitches conceive it is very normal to see a variation in lengths from 58 to 65 days.

It is important to try and be accurate about her conception date as then we can get a bit more of an idea of when she may whelp and you can be more prepared. One way of trying to determine the exact day is to start measuring her temperature during the last week, when the temperature drops below 37C this is a sign that she is about 24-36 hours away from whelping. This is not 100% effective.

**Useful Equipment**

Plenty of newspaper

Towels and a hot water bottle

Scissors

Thermometer

**Stages of Whelping**

There are 3 stages to parturition (giving birth).

 Stage 1 This is the preparation stage when the bitch will start building her nest and become very restless. A mucus discharge may be seen from the vulva and the vulva itself will appear swollen. Contractions will start to occur in this stage although they will not be very strong. Milk will start to appear in the teats.

 Stage 2 This is the actual giving birth stage. This will start with an increase in strength of contractions which the bitch appearing to squeeze from her ribs to her rear end.

The time between the start of straining and the delivery of a puppy is variable but is usually between 10 and 30 minutes.

After the puppy has been delivered the mum should start licking it vigorously to remove membranes from around the face, if she does not do this then it is important to remove it quickly.

The time between the delivery of each puppy is also very variable but if the bitch is still straining and nothing is produced within an hour then it is important to phone us.

 Stage 3 This is the delivery of the placenta, however in dogs this often happens after each individual puppy is born. The placenta in dogs is normally greenish in colour and the mum will often separate this from the puppy by chewing through the umbilical cord. If she is struggling with this you may have to cut through it with a pair of clean scissors. It is important to ensure you do not cut this too short, or the bitch does not chew it too short.

After she has finished whelping the bitch may have a dark coloured discharge from her rear end for a week or so afterwards. But a clearer discharge can remain for up to six weeks whilst the reproductive tract shrinks back to its normal weight.

**When to Call The Vet!**

-Pregnancy lasting more than 70 days with no signs of impending parturition

-The dog is unsettled and strains forcefully but not very regularly

-She starts to strain but then stops

-The is a black/green discharge with no signs of giving birth

-Her temperature has dropped but she has not started showing any signs of giving birth after 48 hours

-She has been straining for over an hour without any puppies being delivered or between puppies, or is still restless two hours after the last puppy being born.

Please be aware that if any of the above complications do occur we will most likely have to see the bitch at the surgery so that we can scan her and possible move straight to theatre for a caesarean. It is very unlikely that the vet will be able to come out to your house so please have emergency transport arrangements lined up in advance!

**Caring for mum after the birth**

As she is lactating to feed the puppy mum will need extra food herself to being to cope with the extra demand. For the first 4 weeks she should be fed 5-6 small meals a day or ad lib on a diet especially for lactation. This should be reduced as she starts to wean the puppies.

She should be encouraged to exercise while lactating but this should be done close to the house so that she doesn’t spread any infections to the puppies and once weaning has begun she should be encouraged to leave the nest for longer periods of time.

**Care of the puppies after the birth**

Mum should be able to care for all of the puppies needs in the first few weeks, however, the puppies should be weighed regularly and should gain between 5 and 10% in bodyweight every day. The birth weight should have been doubled by the time they are 8-10days old.

Check them all on day 1, and then regularly, for signs of congenital problems such as cleft palate or harelip. The umbilicus should be clean and not bulging. The breathing should be regular and quiet and there should be no discharge from the eyes or ears. If you at all worried, pop them into us at the surgery and we can check them over.

**MILESTONES:** Standing from 10 days

 Walking from 3 weeks

 Open eyes from 10 days (up to 14 days)

 Hearing from 2 weeks

 Shivering reflex from 1 week

**Weaning**

This is a gradual process which normally starts around 3 and a half weeks of age and is usually completed around 5 weeks. During this time they will still suckle from their mum but she will usually start to spend more and more time away from them, she should still be allowed to have frequent access to them during the day and the night.

There are many ways to wean a puppy, one way is to first wean them onto a baby rice mixed with luke warm water, at first offered on a finger and then in a shallow bowl. After this you can move them onto a specifically designed puppy food. Another way to do it is to soak a hard puppy food in warm water to make it into a gruel and feed this.

**FEEDING GUIDELINES**: 3-6 weeks feed 5-6 very small meals a day

 6-8 weeks feed slightly larger meals 4-5 times a day

 10 weeks feed the allowance in 3 meals a day until half its ideal adult bodyweight has been reached, after this they can be fed in one or 2 meals a day.

We do not recommend ad lib feeding of puppies as this can lead to over eating and obesity.

Signs seen with under nutrition include: inactivity, poor weight gain and even death.

**IF YOU ARE AT ALL CONCERNED AT ANY STAGE OF WHELPING OR THE POST WHELPING PERIOD PLEASE DO NOT HESITATE TO PHONE US ANS WE CAN ADVISE YOU AS TO THE BEST POSSIBLE COURSE OF ACTION.**