

Caring Vets

261 Camden Valley Way, Narellan 2567
Phone (02) 4647 6321 Fax (02) 4647 6884



Pregnancy

Pregnancy in the bitch is an average of 63 days (9 weeks) from mating. Pregnancy length can range from 58-68 days.

Pregnancy Diagnosis

There are 3 main forms of pregnancy diagnosis in the bitch:

- 1) Abdominal Palpation - Abdominal palpation for pregnancy diagnosis is best performed 3-4 weeks after mating. False negatives can result in bitches with small litters, where the bitch guards (flexes) her abdomen during palpation or in overweight bitches.
- 2) X-Ray - X-ray is a very effective tool for pregnancy diagnosis, it is the most effective method for counting the number of pups present. X-ray of the pregnant bitch is done after day 45 as before day 45 the pups skeletal system is not adequately calcified and will not be seen.
- 3) Ultrasound – Ultrasound is also a very effective tool for pregnancy diagnosis but is less effective for counting the number of pups present. Ultrasound for pregnancy diagnosis is best performed from day 20.

Nutrition

Pregnant bitches should be fed a balance high quality diet. If a good quality nutritionally balanced diet is fed there should be no need for calcium and vitamin supplements. Excessive calcium intake should be avoided.

Food intake in the pregnant bitch increases from the 5th week and in the last week of pregnancy they should be eating about 1.3 times the energy required for adult maintenance.

Lactating bitches require 1.2 times the adult maintenance energy in the first week of lactation and 3.5 times the energy at peak lactation.

If a bitch is overdue for vaccination or unvaccinated she should be vaccinated against Parvovirus in mid pregnancy. This will help provide immunity to the pups against Parvovirus during the first few weeks of their lives.

Bitches should be wormed in mid pregnancy and along with their non-weaned pups every 2 weeks after parturition.

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Parturition

Body temperature in bitches usually drops down to 37-38°C for the last week of pregnancy. 2-3 days before whelping bitches often show 'nesting' behaviours.

Labour has 3 stages

1st Stage – Cervical relaxation and dilation usually takes an average of 4 hours but in a first time bitch can take up to 36 hours. There are only weak uterine contractions.

2nd Stage – Characterised by strong uterine contractions with visible straining. 2nd stage of labour is extremely variable in length. Straining should be less than 40 minutes per pup. Generally there should be no more than 5 hours rest between pups. If the delay between pups is greater than 6 hours or straining longer than 40 minutes veterinary advice should be sought.

The bitch will often clean the pups and allow them to suckle between successive births. If the bitch does not remove the membranes from the pup's head you may need to do this to prevent the pup suffocating. If the umbilical cord is not removed you may tie it off with cotton at about 1-4 cm and cut away the excess.

3rd Stage – Expulsion of the placenta – Unless pups are born with their foetal membranes intact expulsion of the placenta will occur separately before with or after subsequent births. The bitch will usually eat the placentas but this may be best avoided after the first few pups if litter size is large.

A bitch relaxed and nursing her pups contentedly usually marks the end of whelping. The bitch is then usually given a single dose of oxytocin to help the uterus contract and express any remaining placentas.

- Puppies should be wormed every 2 weeks till 3 months then every month till 6 months.
From 6 months they are then wormed every 3 months.
- Puppies are normally weaned at 6-8 weeks
- Puppies receive their first vaccination at 6-8 weeks
- Puppies must be micro-chipped prior to sale.