

## Pregnancy

Having a litter of puppies can be a fun and rewarding experience. However, it is important to know what to expect and how to keep close track of the progress of your pet. With proper, attentive care, you can be confident that your pet will produce a healthy litter.

The first step to a pregnant dog is a successful breeding experience. Before beginning any breeding program, be sure that your pet is healthy by having her examined by a veterinarian. If your pet is healthy and sexually mature, begin to watch for signs of estrus or heat. Common signs are a swelling of the vulva and a bloody vaginal discharge. During this time, the female will also begin to sniff and lick the area frequently. Between the 10th and 14th day, allow your pet to mate. If using a stud dog, most owners will mate the dogs twice during this time period. A typical canine pregnancy lasts an average of 63 days. As your pet nears her due date, it is important to begin preparations for a successful birth. During the last third of your pet's pregnancy, gradually increase her food supply. It may be beneficial to allow her to eat many small meals throughout the day as her stomach may be compressed by the pressure of the babies. It is also important to begin preparing the birthing box in order to help your pet become accustomed to her new area and to feel secure. The birthing box should be large enough for your pet to move around comfortably and have low sides or a hole in the side for her easy access. Line the box with plenty of clean newspapers that can be easily removed during the birthing process.

As your pet nears her time to deliver she may begin to show some unusual behaviors. Some animals try to hide during this time, while others want to be continuously near their owners. It is important that you watch for and respect your pet's needs during this time. It is also important that your pet has been introduced to and is comfortable with her birthing area before hand, so that she will seek out this new safe haven. As your pet goes into labor, she will start to strain and begin delivering. Delivery times vary greatly based on breed, head size and litter size. Consult your veterinarian regarding your specific pet. If a successful delivery has not occurred within two hours after your pet begins straining, consult your veterinarian immediately.

Most puppies are born within ten minutes after they are visible in the birth canal and are encased in a placental sac. This sac is known as the afterbirth and will either be delivered with or after the puppy. It is normal for the mother to eat this sac shortly after delivering each pup. The hormones contained in each afterbirth trigger milk production in the mother. After birth, the mother may also lick and nudge the new puppy somewhat roughly. This behavior will clean the puppy and encourage it to begin breathing. If the mother does not remove the sac from the puppy, it may be necessary for you to quickly remove the sac and stimulate the puppy to breathe. Do this by making sure the puppy's airways are clear by gently blowing in its face. Gently rub the puppy with a warm towel to clean it and encourage respiration. If the mother has not chewed the pup's umbilical cord, you may also need to assist her by tying a clean string around the cord and cutting it approximately an inch from the puppy's belly. Remember that if your female dog appears unable to deliver a puppy or is in distress, call your veterinarian immediately!

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After delivery, watch your new mother and pups carefully. Monitor the temperature around the animals and if it is cool, add a heat lamp. For the first few days the ambient temperature should be kept between 85 and 90 degrees, until the puppies are able to maintain their own body temperature. Be sure to closely monitor the mother to make sure she is producing an adequate milk supply and monitor the puppies to ensure that they are receiving adequate nourishment during this time.

