

Ante-Natal Care

(Canine)

Before the pregnancy: It is important that the bitch is a good weight and in good health even before becoming pregnant, for a successful mating and pregnancy. She should be on a good balanced and complete diet, such as is provided by the premium range of dog foods sold at vets and pet shops. Bitches should not be bred prior to their third heat. Pregnancy rates and numbers of puppies are highest when the bitch is aged between 2 & 5 years. Bitches should be up to date with vaccines before mating.

Physical changes in pregnancy: The gestation period (time from mating to when the pups are born) is around 63 days. Over this time there is a gradual weight gain and enlargement of the abdomen. Mammary development takes place mostly in the last 20 days of pregnancy.

Diet: A dog that is on a good complete and balanced diet, such as a dry premium food, will not need any supplements of phosphorus and calcium.

In the last part of the pregnancy, a very swollen abdomen pressing on the stomach may mean that the bitch is not able to eat large meals. Offer her several smaller meals throughout the day. We recommend feeding a puppy formula during the last trimester of pregnancy and while feeding the puppies.

Worming: Adult dogs should be wormed every three months against common tape, hook, whip and roundworms. It is important to worm the bitch just before she becomes pregnant and then monthly during the pregnancy to minimize the worm burden at birth.

Exercise: If your bitch is fit and active, there is no reason to stop her within reason – obviously extremely strenuous exercise would not be advised. Towards the end of the pregnancy she may be more tired than normal so keep exercise to gentle walks and perhaps at cooler times of the day.

Confirming pregnancy:

- **Palpation-** can be suspicious from 24 days.
- **Ultrasound scanning-** can confirm pregnancy from about 28 days of gestation.
- **Radiography-** can confirm pregnancy AND number of puppies from about 35 days of gestation.

The last few weeks: Making sure your bitch is in top health and has had all the necessary veterinary care during her pregnancy increases the chances of a trouble free birth and healthy puppies.

In the last weeks before the pups are due, some owners choose to have a further veterinary check up just to make sure the she and her puppies are well.