

These notes are intended as a guide to answer some of the common questions that arise once a bitch has been mated. It should be remembered that there is a lot of individual variation and exact timings cannot be 100% accurately predicted.

Pregnancy Diagnosis

It may be possible to detect a pregnancy by feeling (palpating) the tummy (abdomen) of your bitch. This is most likely at about four weeks after mating. If a pregnancy cannot be felt then we can offer an ultrasound scan of the tummy. This usually allows us to confirm a pregnancy and the presence of viable pups at the time of the scan but does not allow us to tell how many pups are present. Scans are best performed four or more weeks after mating.

Due Date

It is very difficult to predict an exact whelping (birth) date. Although the average length of pregnancy in a bitch is 63 days, whelping can sometimes occur up to a week earlier or later than expected. This is because the due date should be worked out from the ovulation date, **not** the mating date. Canine semen can remain viable in the female tract for up to seven days, so if a bitch has already ovulated when she is mated her pregnancy length will appear shorter than 63 days. On the other hand, if she is mated before she has ovulated her pregnancy length will appear longer than 63 days.



If you are concerned that your bitch has gone past her due date, we would advise you arrange an appointment for her to be examined. There are a number of scenarios where a bitch that has had a pregnancy confirmed may not go on to whelp normally - this includes resorption of the developing foetuses, abortion, the bitch delivering the pups but eating them and death of the pups in the womb. An x-ray is usually recommended at this stage to determine what may have happened as there may be serious consequences for the bitch if the pups have died in the womb.

Whelping

First stage labour can last up to 24 hours in the bitch. The presence of a dark green discharge is normal as this means that the placenta has separated and a pup should follow. Abdominal straining usually results in a puppy being produced within two hours of onset. Bitches may rest for approximately two hours between the delivery of consecutive pups. It can be difficult to determine the end of whelping even by feeling the bitch's tummy and radiography or ultrasound examinations may be required to assist in confirming the presence of any remaining pups. Puppies born more than seven days prematurely are extremely unlikely to survive.



Aftercare

Some bitches show unpredictable or aggressive behaviour to their pups, particularly after a caesarean section. Unless you are absolutely sure that the bitch has accepted her puppies, she should not be left with them unattended. It is important to check that she has plenty of milk for her pups, as top up bottle-feeds with a milk replacer, eg: Welpi, may be required, especially with large litters. Vaginal discharges should dry up within a few days and they should not be excessive, contain fresh blood or be smelly.



Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any concerns about your bitch or her puppies. We are more than happy to talk to you or to arrange for you to bring them in to the surgery for a check-up at any time. Please contact us on 01722-333291.



Recommended Reading

The Book of The Bitch by J M Evans and Kay White is an excellent paperback book and gives a very good overview for inexperienced breeders - ISBN 1860540236, £9.95, and is available from reception.





Quick Reference Guide

Pregnancy Diagnosis and Whelping in Bitches



and
Whelping in Bitches

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