



## **Janice L. Cain, DVM**

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Primary Care – Canine Reproduction – Internal Medicine

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## **PREGNANCY INFORMATION**

### **RESOURCES**

If you are relatively inexperienced with the whelping/puppy rearing process, purchasing a book or two on the subject is highly recommend. While we haven't found the perfect reference that will be 100% correct about all situations, most books contain a lot of very useful information. Searching "dog breeding" on the Amazon.com web site is recommended.

### **NUTRITION**

Most bitches need a higher intake of protein and calories during pregnancy and throughout lactation. An easy way to accomplish this is to gradually change over to a "growth formula" or puppy food in the same brand of high quality dog food you usually use. Frequent smaller meals may be needed toward the end of gestation. Dr. Cain often says a bitch can't eat too much during lactation as it requires a lot of energy to produce milk, and a high nutritional intake will help her keep her condition and recover from the litter more quickly. Be careful though, we don't want to over-feed and create diarrhea or excessive weight gain. If the bitch is fed a high quality food, and has a good appetite, additional supplements during gestation are not necessary.

### **EXERCISE**

It is important for the bitch to maintain her normal level of exercise throughout pregnancy. The bitch will usually have an easier time with whelping if she is fit and not too fat! You will have to judge the normal level of exercise, based on the breed and current level of fitness. Certainly, leash-walking is fine as is some swimming. Running after an object (i.e., fetch) may be OK early on, but decrease that activity later—some bitches won't know when to quit!

### **WHELPING BOX**

Most breeders will set up a whelping box in a designated room of the house. It is important to control the ambient temperature of the box once the pups are born, it should be kept around 80 degrees. You can construct a whelping box with a ledge (or pig rail) around the inside perimeter. This prevents a pup from getting crushed between the bitch and the wall.



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### **DUE DATE**

If you have done ovulation timing, Dr. Cain will be able to give you a pretty reliable whelping date. Predicting a whelping date based on breeding alone is more difficult, but ranges from 58-65 days from each breeding.

### **PRE-WHELPING CONSIDERATIONS**

You can monitor the rectal temperature of a bitch prior to whelping. Many bitches will have a significant drop in temperature to below 99 degrees 24 hours prior to whelping. The temp won't necessarily stay down after the initial drop; it can come back up. Monitor the temp first thing in the am and in the evening daily during the last week of gestation. The temp drop doesn't occur in all bitches.

### **GETTING THE CORRECT HEAD-COUNT**

We often will do a late-gestational X-ray to count fetal skeletons. This information can be very helpful when up all night with a bitch in labor. For large litters and in some cases, X-rays are not 100% reliable. In some situations, we can't count accurately but can still give a reasonable estimate. We can also learn some important information regarding pup size and if any signs of problems are present.

### **WHELPWISE MONITORING**

Dr. Cain highly recommends the labor monitoring service and equipment you can lease through the Whelpwise company (Veterinary Perinatal Specialties; 1-888-281-4867; [www.whelpwise.com](http://www.whelpwise.com)). This equipment must be reserved well in advance! With this system you can monitor uterine contractions and detect fetal heart-beats. Most people can use this equipment easily, but it is an intensive monitoring system. It is very helpful and reliable for detecting problems before they become serious. We can also dispense pre-drawn syringes of oxytocin and calcium that can be properly administered with this system. These medications can only be prescribed to Whelpwise users and need to be given under direction of the Whelpwise staff.

### **WHEN TO WORRY—WHEN TO CALL**

While we can't list every possible trouble-sign possible, here is a list of some of the more common problems. If any of these situations occur, please call for assistance:

1. More that 24-48 hours after a significant temperature drop and no signs of labor in a term bitch.
2. Presence of a dark green to black vaginal discharge at any time during gestation, including preceding labor. This discharge is normally passed with the puppy or placenta



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(it comes from the placental attachment to the uterus), but if seen prior to actual delivery, could represent a problem.

3. Presence of any part of a pup for more than several minutes, without progression to complete delivery of that pup (i.e., a stuck pup). You can try to lubricate around the pup with some K-Y type of lubricant.

4. Active, hard labor with visible contractions or groans from the bitch for more than 15-30 minutes without delivery of a pup.

5. Delivery of a dead pup—especially if it is the first pup after a prolonged effort from the bitch. Sometimes after this, the rest of the pups will deliver easily, but if more than 1-2 hours pass and no further labor, you should call the hospital.

6. The delivery time between pups is quite variable. Some bitches will go no more than 20-30 minutes between pups, while others can take several hours. The standard rule is no more than 2-4 hours between pups, but this is a wide range and may not be appropriate for all situations. Walking the bitch, getting her to eat a little something or drink water can help. A little break here and there in a large litter can be very normal. Some bitches, though, will wear out (termed uterine inertia) and not be able to deliver the remainder of a large litter without veterinary intervention.

**BRVC is available Monday - Friday , 7am-10pm and Saturday and Sunday 8am-8pm.**

**Emergency Hospitals should be utilized during any of the hours BRVC is closed.**

### **LITTER EVALUATION**

A litter evaluation can be done between 7-8 weeks of age. Puppies can be vaccinated, dewormed and microchipped at the appointment. Each puppy will get an individual report of the examination, detailing their overall condition and any medical concerns that should be followed after going to their new homes.