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### Care of Mother Dog and Puppies

A week before your dog is to whelp (give birth); you should provide her with a large box. The box should be large enough for her to stretch out in and have room for the puppies. The mother should be able to enter the box easily; the sides of the box should remain on to keep the pups in and drafts out. Place the box in a warm area, which is free from distractions, yet familiar to the bitch. You may place blankets, rugs, towels or newspaper in the box for bedding. The temperature in the area of the whelping box should be 80-85°F.

About 24 hours before labor the bitch's temperature will usually drop to 100°F or below. She may refuse food and become restless. At this time you may see that milk is being produced. A thick mucus discharge may appear. When these signs appear, whelping is imminent and this may be a good time to briefly exercise the dog to allow for urination and defecation.

Primary uterine contractions will begin shortly after the before mentioned signs appear. The dog will not always show pain from contractions, but will be restless and nervous.

When labor begins the mother should be left alone. If she will not use the whelping box in favor of another area, do not move her. Moving the dog may take her out of labor. The uterine contractions will be assisted by the bitch straining her abdominal muscles to force the puppies out of the birth canal. The birth of each puppy will be preceded by a greenish fluid filled sac. Each puppy is attached to the placenta by an umbilical cord. Most puppies are born head first, but many are born breech. Either position is considered normal.

Most experienced mothers will break the sac covering the pup and lick it clean. She will bite the umbilical cord off and often will eat the placenta and afterbirth. If the sac is not broken the pup may not be able to breathe. The pup may become tangled in the umbilical cord and strangled, so be prepared to assist if necessary. If it does not stress the bitch to help her, try to keep her from eating the placenta.

If the mother does not take the initiative to clean up the puppy, you must do so. Remove the sac, clean the face, remove any mucus from its mouth and nose. The umbilical cord should be tied off with cotton thread, one inch from the pups body and cut off beyond the tie. The remaining cord will shrivel and dry up within a few days. When the pup begins to squirm and cry, place it with the mother.

Most puppies are born 30-60 minutes apart, but variations are possible. It is not unusual for two or more pups to be born in close succession followed by a 4 to 6 hour resting stage. After the last pup has been born, the bitch will be more relaxed with no straining. She should be allowed brief exercise to allow for urination and defecation. The mother dog may have diarrhea for a few days as a result of eating the placenta and afterbirth. She may have a vaginal discharge that appears bloody or greenish black in color, for up to a few weeks. This discharge is not usually an indication of a problem, unless it persists, and then it should be checked by your veterinarian.

If a pup is born weak or the mother ignores it, assistance can save its life. If the newborn pup is cold and weak and not breathing, hold it firmly and swing it up and down between your legs with its head down. If you do not understand this procedure seek assistance. This procedure will aid in draining the fluids from the lungs. To stimulate the pup to breathe, rub it briskly with a warm towel and tickle the roof of its mouth.

Dogs inherit all necessary skills for normal whelping. Intervention may be a disservice to both the bitch and the pups. Veterinary assistance may become necessary if specific problems arise.

When to seek veterinary attention:

- ❖ If after four hours of intermittent straining and contractions the bitch enters a resting stage without a birth, she should be examined.
- ❖ The same is true if she has intense contractions without having a puppy within 30 minutes.

Ideally she should be examined within 24 hours after whelping, to ensure no pups remain.

The mother dog will require 2 to 3 times the amount of food as usual. This should be divided into 3 to 4 daily feedings. Dietary supplements are occasionally given. If you have a small breed dog (less than 20 lbs) or any dog with a large litter, calcium supplements may be recommended during the nursing period. Consult with your veterinarian for the best formulas suited to your dog. Have fresh water available at all times.

Post-whelping diseases include: uterine infections, mammary gland infections, and eclampsia (milk fever). A dark colored material may be expelled from the vulva for several days. This discharge should cease within 14 days. If the uterus becomes infected, the discharge may increase and become foul smelling. The bitch may become depressed and lose her appetite. Should these symptoms appear, remove the pups from the mother and seek veterinary aid immediately.

Mammary gland infections will cause depression and elevated temperature. One or more breasts will swell, become hard, become reddish purple and be very painful. This condition will require immediate attention by a veterinarian. The pups should not be allowed to nurse.

Nursing puppies can be a strain on the mother. Occasionally the bitch may suffer from a loss of calcium (eclampsia) during the first month after whelping. The mother's calcium supply is utilized to produce milk for the pups. If the bitch shows these signs she will require immediate veterinary help: muscle incoordination, excessive trembling, muscle twitching, convulsions, excessive drooling, extreme nervousness and panting. Treatment must be initiated immediately or death will result. Although, the pups will complain, they must not be allowed to nurse. Consult your veterinarian concerning the use of milk replacer.

The best rule of thumb is to handle the puppies as little as possible during the first 3-4 weeks. After that you can assist each pup with positive socialization. Cradle the pup for one or two minutes twice a day. Do not handle the pups too much or allow rough handling by others. A good mother will do most of the work in caring for the puppies right up to weaning. Too much human intervention will do disservice to the pups. The pups should be examined by a veterinarian soon after birth. The room temperature where the puppies are housed should be no less than 70°F to avoid chilling. Cold floors should be avoided. The pups eyes will begin to open at 10-14 days. Once the pups begin to explore their environment they can be fed a mixture of puppy food and water. Cows milk should not be fed to puppies.

The pups will become more and more independent by 5-6 weeks of age. At this time the weaning process will begin. The pups should be separated from the mother for an increasing number of hours each day. This will aid in a smooth transition to a life without mother. Once the pups are eating on their own, the mother's food intake should be greatly reduced. This will help her to produce less milk. If the bitch continues to produce milk after weaning her breasts might engorge and become painful. Placing warm towels on her breasts and gently massaging them will help to relieve this congestion. Completely withholding food for 24 hours will aid in drying the mother up. When feeding is resumed give only ½ her maintenance requirement for 2 days. Then return to normal amounts.

If you have questions concerning your dog or her puppies, don't hesitate to call us.