



# SHILOH VETERINARY HOSPITAL

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## CANINE WHELPING GUIDELINES

### 1. Feeding

- a. Vitamins or calcium supplements are not needed if feeding a good quality diet.
- b. Table food, milk, bones, or canned food is not suggested.
- c. General rule: Do not overfeed. Overweight mothers have a harder time delivering puppies.

Do not increase the amount fed the mother until the 6th week of pregnancy. As a rule, increase the amount you feed by 10% per week the last three weeks of pregnancy and 25% per week while the puppies are nursing. This may vary with litter size.

For the first day or two after whelping, the new mother may not eat as normal. If she refuses food for greater than 48 hours, call the doctor.

Most deliveries require no assistance or special preparations. The following is suggested to minimize any problems which may rarely arise, to help insure a healthy mother and pups, and to allow you to help your pet efficiently and safely.

### 2. Preparations:

Most deliveries require no assistance or special preparations. The following is suggested to minimize any problems which may rarely arise, to help insure a healthy mother and pups, and to allow you to help your pet efficiently and safely.

- a. DO NOT use heating pads or heat lamps to warm the pups or the box.
- b. Shredded newspapers are the best bedding.
- c. Towels are used to clean, dry, and rub newborn puppies if needed.
- d. Use a rectal thermometer to record the mother's temperature.
- e. Scissors can be used to cut the umbilical cord of newborn puppies and to clip the hair away from the mother's vulva and mammary areas if needed.
- f. Sewing thread can be used to tie off the umbilical cord of the newborn puppies if necessary.

### 3. Labor:

A normal gestation period is 57-70 days from 1st breeding.

- a. **ONSET OF LABOR:** Within 6 to 24 hours of the onset of labor, the mother will become extremely nervous and restless (whining, crying, panting, shivering, wants in and out, refuses food, etc.). This is normal. At this time, take the mother outside of mild exercise and to go to the bathroom. Another method of predicting the time of the first contractions is to take the mother's rectal temperature. Take her temperature and record it at the same time everyday, starting about one week before expected delivery. The normal temperature is 100.5-102 degrees. Within 12-24 hours of the onset of labor her temperature will drop 2 to 3 degrees.
- b. **CONTRACTIONS AND DELIVERY:** Bitches have contractions much the same as women do, but timing contractions is no help in determining when delivery will occur. It is, however, important to note the time of the mother's first contractions and to write it down. Contractions are easily detected. The mother usually lays down and

strains as if trying to have a bowel movement; the back is arched, the abdominal muscles are tight, and she may whine and cry.

*If there is no puppy delivered within 2 hours of the first contraction, call the doctor, or if the contractions are very hard and nothing is produced in 20-30 minutes, this could indicate a problem. If it is longer than 2 HOURS between puppies and she is still actively contracting, call the doctor.*

Sometimes the mother may become extremely tired and stop contractions to rest for several minutes to several hours. Don't count the rest period when timing.

After each delivery the mother goes through a resting stage during which mild contractions and delivery of afterbirth occurs. When all the pups and afterbirth have been delivered she will stop contractions and devote her attention to cleaning and nursing the puppies.

#### 4. OBSTETRICAL CARE:

- a. **AFTER DELIVERY** the mother opens the sac surrounding the pup, cleans off the pup and bites the umbilical cord. Sometimes the pups are delivered so quickly the mother cannot do her job. She may be so overwhelmed by the whole process that she won't do her job and will need help. After delivery, tear and remove the cellophane-like membrane covering the puppy, clean the face, and remove any fluid of mucous from the mouth and nose with your fingers and/or tissues, and vigorously rub the pup with a clean towel to dry it and stimulate respiration and circulation. Do not be afraid to be fairly vigorous with rubbing. After a few minutes of rubbing, the puppy should begin to squirm and cry. After it is dry you may put it back with its mother.
- b. The umbilical cord will usually be taken care of by the mother, but if she won't bite it off within 30 minutes of delivery (no sooner) you may tie it off about one inch from the body with thread and cut it off with scissors. Apply iodine to the entire umbilical cord of all pups within one hour of birth. Repeat the iodine treatment in 24 hours.
- c. After each puppy is born the afterbirth, which surrounded it in the uterus is usually expelled within 10-30 minutes. Sometimes the mother will deliver two or three puppies and then expel the afterbirths all at once. There should be one afterbirth expelled for each puppy delivered. It is wise to count them to be certain none are retained. If she retains any afterbirth in the uterus it could make her extremely sick. It is natural for the mother to consume the afterbirth as it is expelled, but it may make her vomit so it is best to remove the afterbirth as soon as possible after it is expelled.
- d. If the puppy is lodged in the birth canal and the mother is unable to expel it (half in and half out), within 3-4 minutes rapid assistance is needed to save the puppy. Often there is not enough time to drive to the hospital. Immediately grasp the puppy with a clean towel and exert gentle, steady, firm traction. Do not jerk or pull suddenly. It is helpful to have someone else hold the mother or she may try to bite. If you cannot remove the puppy call the doctor.
- e. **NORMAL FINDINGS:**
  - i. It is normal for the mother to have dark green discharge during labor. This is a pigment formed around each puppy while it is in the uterus. When discharged during labor, usually a puppy soon follows.
  - ii. A balloon-like, fluid-filled sac may be seen protruding from the vulva during the first stages of labor. This is normal. It will break and usually a puppy will soon follow.

- iii. The normal presentation of the puppy in the birth canal is nose first and laying on its stomach. About 1/3rd of all puppies, however, are born hind feet first and this is normal.
- iv. A reddish-brown mucous vaginal discharge after whelping is normal for about three weeks. If the discharge looks like pus, becomes bright red, is of a large amount or lasts longer than three weeks, call the doctor.

#### **5. BEHAVIOR OF THE MOTHER:**

During whelping and nursing the mother may not be her usual self. She may be very nervous, aggressive, and filled with a sense of protectiveness for her new family. This will usually fade as time passes. You can help by not allowing people around "ooh" and "ah" and by keeping all other animals away from her nest. She may even abandon her puppies if not allowed solitude.

#### **6. AFTER WHELPING:**

It is important to bring both the mother and the puppies in to the clinic to be checked over within 24 hours of delivery. This is to insure that all the puppies are healthy, and also so that the mother may be checked and given an injection of oxytocin. This injection will help her to expel any afterbirth that may not have been expelled. Arrangements then can be made to remove any dewclaws and dock tails if desired.

Call our office to arrange a time to bring in the new family.

#### **IMPORTANT NOTES:**

1. Keep room temperature at 75-80 F. Chilling can be fatal to newborn puppies.
2. Dewclaws removed and tails docked can be done at 2-3 days of age if desired.
3. Puppies eyes open at about 10-14 days of age.
4. Puppies ears open at about 14 days of age.
5. Puppies should start their vaccinations at 6-8 weeks of age.
6. All puppies potentially can carry worms. It is recommended to either check a stool sample or deworm the puppies.
7. **The mother's next heat cycle will be about 4 months after whelping. If you want the mother spayed, it is best done 3-4 weeks after the puppies are weaned.**

#### **WHEN TO CALL/NOTIFY THE DOCTOR:**

1. No puppy delivered within 30 minutes of hard labor. This means actively straining and having contractions.
2. Longer than 30 minutes between puppies and the mother is actively contracting.
3. You are unable to remove a puppy lodged in the birth canal.
4. Pregnancy lasts longer than 69 days.
5. There is a greenish-black discharge, or a balloon-filled sac appears from the vulva and no labor or pups are delivered within 2 hours.
6. Mother will not accept the puppies or allow them to nurse within 12 hours of birth.
7. Mother becomes extremely nervous and restless with shivering, panting, fever above 102.5 degrees, or is ill in any way.
8. Greater than 4 hours between pups.
9. Severe bleeding.
10. Puppies crying continually for longer than 2 hours.
11. Mother refuses food 48 hours after whelping.
12. If the mother's discharge looks like pus, becomes bright red, is a large volume or lasts longer than 3 weeks.
13. Mother's milk looks like pus or blood or the milk glands become hot, hard or lumpy.