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Breeding for Dog Owners – Pregnancy

How long does pregnancy in the dog last?

Pregnancy, also called the gestation period, normally ranges from 57-65 days with an average of 63 days.

With a planned breeding, the date of mating should be carefully recorded. If there are two matings, make a note of the exact dates and expect birth to occur between 63 and 65 days later.



Immediately after my female dog has been mated, is there anything I should do?

Make sure that she does not have the opportunity to mate with any other dogs. Remember that estrus will continue for several more days and she could theoretically become pregnant from another dog during this period. After a planned mating it is a good idea to allow her to rest quietly for a few hours.

Should I change her food?

It is important that she is in good physical condition before she is mated. Both the male and female dog should be examined by a veterinarian prior to mating.

After mating, food intake should remain the same during the first two-thirds of pregnancy (approximately six weeks after mating). If a well-balanced premium diet is being fed there is no need to use additional vitamin or mineral supplements. Discuss nutritional supplements and vitamins with your veterinarian before giving them to your dog. Some large breed dogs may have adverse effects if they are given certain supplements.

What do I do after the sixth week?

After the sixth week of pregnancy, food intake should be gradually increased and high energy, low fiber foods are recommended. As the fetuses increase in size, abdominal pressure increases and frequent small meals are advised. Diets containing high levels of Docosahexaenoic Acid (DHA) have been shown to improve the health and development of puppies and should be considered. Discuss DHA-supplemented diets for your mother dog and puppies with your veterinarian.

During the last three weeks of pregnancy, food intake can be increased by up to one and a half times the normal level by feeding smaller meals more frequently.

If you are unsure about any supplements or medication, please do not hesitate to contact your veterinarian. Some commonly used drugs should be avoided if your dog is pregnant.

How can I be certain my dog is pregnant?

Early pregnancy detection in dogs can be extremely difficult. Unfortunately, as yet, we have no reliable laboratory test. Trans-abdominal palpation (feeling the abdomen for enlarged uterus) by a veterinarian at about three to four weeks after mating may be performed, but the results are variable. It has to be said that results depend more upon the relaxation of the female than the experience of the doctor!

Abdominal ultrasound is currently the method of choice. Depending on the equipment, positive diagnosis can be made as early as three weeks. Most scans from one month of pregnancy and onwards are reliable. Any estimate of the number of puppies should be treated with caution. It can be difficult to accurately count the number of fetuses on an ultrasound. An abdominal radiograph (x-ray) during the last two weeks of pregnancy, generally around week seven, is the most accurate method for counting fetuses and should be performed on all pregnant dogs. Otherwise, you will not know when your female is finished having puppies and this could lead to puppies remaining trapped inside the mother.



Should I change her routine as pregnancy advances?

As pregnancy progresses, intra-abdominal pressure increases and so does the mother's food requirements. The number of meals usually needs to be increased rather than the quantity per meal. Let your pet decide how much physical activity she needs. This depends on the number of puppies and the amount of intra-abdominal pressure she is experiencing. Do not over exercise a pregnant female. Check for any vaginal discharges and contact your veterinarian if you have any concerns

*This client information sheet is based on material written by Ernest Ward, DVM.
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