

A WHELPING DISCUSSION

Most dogs handle whelping and caring for their babies very well, but here are some important tips to help the upcoming events progress smoothly.

1) Prepare a whelping area well in advance of the event (two to three weeks is good). Do not wait until the day of the delivery (or even one to two days before). A corner in a quiet room, or even an entire spare bed- or bathroom is an ideal location. Get several old (but clean) blankets together to use for bedding. These provide bedding that is warm, soft, absorbent, and WASHABLE. (After the whelping is complete, the soiled blankets should be removed for washing, and replaced with fresh ones.) Encourage our pet to adopt this, "Whelping area", as her own.

2) Most dogs refuse food 12 to 24 hours before labor begins, so watch for this. They also tend to get reclusive, and more quiet than normal. Most owners, "Pick up", on this, and tend to become anxious themselves. You do not want to transfer any anxiety you may have to your pet, so do not shower your pet with extra attention and affection at this point.

3) You must keep the last days of your pet's pregnancy, and especially the day of whelping calm and business-like. (Many pets are so used to having their owners solve all of their problems that they might expect you to take care of this one too.) Delivering puppies is a lot of hard work, and when labor begins, your pet must settle into the job at hand early on. The best way to encourage this behavior is to quietly observe your pet every 10 to 15 minutes, but DO NOT hold or talk to her. Just silently observe, and leave her area. A dog in true labor gives the appearance of pushing and straining hard enough to approximate the effort needed for a difficult bowel movement. If your pet strains this hard for 60 minutes without any progress, call for advice. It often takes 10 to 15 minutes of hard straining to deliver the first pup. After a pup is delivered, your pet will probably rest for 10 to 15 minutes before resuming labor. If you see a puppy born, and your pet does not immediately tear the placental sack open, do this for her. A knife or scissors does this job very well. You should also wipe the puppy dry, and immediately replace it beside your pet. 30 to 60 minutes between pups is normal. If your pet labors hard for an hour between pups with no progress, you should call for advice.

4) When whelping is complete your pet will probably get a peaceful, contented look about her, and she will become very attentive to her babies. (Most of you human mothers out there seem very capable of recognizing this scene.) She may be very tired by this time too.

5) It is usually best to wait 30 to 60 minutes after the conclusion of whelping to offer food and water. This first meal should be a light one. The best food to give your pet while nursing is a good, name brand of puppy chow, and let her eat all she wants.

6) A good practice is to bring mother and babies to the hospital the day after whelping to have your pet examined, and to perform any necessary procedures to the pups. The tails and dewclaws should be removed from the pups at 1 to 2 days of age in those breeds where this is done. (Some of the "How to" books suggest having the tails and dewclaws removed at a later age, but this is wrong.

Good luck, and have a good time with this happening.