



BREEDING YOUR BITCH

FACT SHEET 3

CARING FOR YOUR BITCH FROM CONCEPTION TO WEANING

PREPARATION

If you intend to breed from your bitch, there are a few important points to consider before you start. You will need to make sure that there will be homes for all the offspring, taking into account that some litters can be as large as a dozen puppies or more. With large numbers of unwanted puppies each year, both pedigree and crossbred, you will need to ensure that you will not be contributing to the growing number of animals requiring homes. Even experienced breeders can have trouble with prospective owners backing out at the last moment or returning puppies after a few days when they cannot cope.

You will also need a considerable amount of space, time and patience. It is important that you have a secluded, quiet area for whelping which is familiar to the bitch. Moving a pregnant bitch to a new area of the house or to the garage just before whelping can be very unsettling. There must also be sufficient space in the room for both the bitch and puppies during the following three weeks. After this, you will need to move both puppies and dam to an area where they can be exposed to the comings and goings of everyday life. This helps the puppies to become properly socialised. This area of the house may also have to serve as an area for prospective owners to view the puppies, so be prepared for visitors to your house.

Caring for a pregnant bitch, together with rearing and finding homes for the puppies, involves a considerable amount of time, often as long as three or four months. In the later stages of pregnancy your bitch will need some additional care and attention, especially as the date for whelping draws near. You will certainly need to commit several full days to supervising the bitch and puppies after the birth. Although your time commitment will gradually lessen, you will have to be prepared to keep the puppies until they are at least eight or twelve weeks old. During this time you will have to make sure that they are wormed properly and possibly have them vaccinated. You and the members of your family will also need to be prepared to deal with dead or deformed puppies, a common problem with large litters.

Finally, producing a litter of puppies will involve you in some cost. You will need to allow for extra feeding, building a whelping pen, heating and lighting and veterinary fees. If you intend to sell the puppies, then you will not see any return on your investment for some months. Remember that it is difficult to sell puppies during the summer and just after Christmas. Bear in mind also, that you may make no return on your outlay if your bitch needs a caesarean section.

WHERE TO START

If you plan to breed from your bitch then make sure that she is fit before you start. Any on-going problems should be cleared up, especially ear or skin infections that may transmit to the puppies. If in doubt, then check with your vet who will also be able to advise you on vaccination policy. It would be unwise to mate your bitch under two years of age or before the third heat.

You will also need to determine the best time to mate your bitch. A basic knowledge of the bitch's oestrus cycle is vital for this. There are four distinct phases to the cycle:

- **Pro-oestrus**

The period leading up to oestrus or heat is known as *pro-oestrus* and normally lasts about nine or ten days. The vulva will normally swell and you will notice a bloodstained discharge. Your bitch may be attractive to male dogs but will not allow mating to take place.

- **Oestrus**

Pro-oestrus is followed by *oestrus* which lasts nine days on average. The vulva is very swollen and the discharge is straw-coloured rather than blood stained. Your bitch should accept the dog and ovulation will normally occur about two days after the start of oestrus. Most breeders suggest two matings, 48 hours apart at this time, to ensure that the eggs become fertilised.

- **Met-oestrus**

Following oestrus there is a period lasting on average 90 days known as *met-oestrus*. Hormone levels are similar to those seen in pregnancy and it is during this phase your bitch may show symptoms associated with false pregnancy.

- **Anoestrus**

The final part of the cycle is referred to as *anoestrus*, which varies considerably in duration. Lasting on average 75 days, this is a period of sexual inactivity between oestrus cycles.

PREGNANCY

Following mating, you will then need to know how to care for your bitch throughout her pregnancy. The first problem is knowing if the mating has been successful. About 20-30 days post mating it might be possible for your veterinary surgeon to feel the tiny puppies in the uterus by palpation, especially in thinner breeds. Unfortunately, this method is not always reliable. However it is now possible to perform a blood test to give an accurate result. It is best to ask your vet for further details.

Externally, you may see few signs of pregnancy for the first four or five weeks or so. At around 5 weeks you may see the teats enlarge and change colour and at the same time the mammary glands will also enlarge. Check for any vaginal discharge. A small amount of white or transparent mucus is a reasonable indication of pregnancy. Any other type of discharge is cause for concern.

Gradually you may notice that your bitch's abdomen begins to enlarge, normally apparent around five to six weeks after mating. The extra weight of the enlarged

uterus normally causes the spine to sag, making the back bone more prominent. With a small litter you may see no abdominal distension at all.

FEEDING DURING PREGNANCY

Careful attention to feeding is an important part of the overall care. Incorrect feeding can certainly cause problems, especially early on. The temptation to overfeed in the first five weeks should be avoided as this can lead to obesity and problems whelping. As a general rule, increase your bitch's food intake from about the sixth week of pregnancy by about 10% each week to a maximum of between 30 and 50% more than her usual ration.

HOW DENES CAN HELP

Denes have a number of recipes that are suitable for feeding to pregnant or nursing bitches. Use the following tables as a basic guide to the amounts that you should feed.

Remember that the daily ration should be divided into portions as most bitches in the later stage of pregnancy find it easier to consume several smaller meals during the day.

SUGGESTED FEEDING GUIDE FOR PREGNANT BITCHES USING DENES CANNED RECIPES

From mating and for the first five weeks of pregnancy

| Size of dog | Toy & small | Medium | Large | Very large |
|---------------------------|------------------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Quantity of food in grams | 100 - 400 | 400 -1000 | 1000 -1400 | 1400+ |

From the sixth week onward

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-------|
| Quantity of food in grams | 150 - 600 | 600 -1500 | 1500 -2100 | 2100+ |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-------|

If you wish to feed **Denes Wholegrain Mixer** as part of the daily ration then you can replace 25-30% of the tinned food with an equivalent weight of mixer.

SUGGESTED FEEDING GUIDE FOR PREGNANT BITCHES

Using

DENES ADULT OPTIONS COMPLETE DRY FOODS

Or

DENES PUPPY GROWTH DRY FOOD RICH IN CHICKEN & RICE

From mating and for the first five weeks of pregnancy

| Size of dog | Toy & small | Medium | Large | Very large |
|---------------------------|------------------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Quantity of food in grams | 50 - 150 | 150 - 250 | 250 - 400 | 400 - 550 |

From the sixth week onward

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Quantity of food in grams | 75 - 225 | 225 - 375 | 375 - 600 | 600 - 825 |
|---------------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|

USING DENES REMEDIES DURING PREGNANCY

Supplements are also often recommended during pregnancy. We would recommend using:

- **Denes All-in-One Tablets**

Based on seaweed, parsley, watercress, elderberry and wheat germ oil, **Denes All-in-One Tablets** supply a wide range of essential, naturally derived vitamins, minerals and trace elements. If you normally give your bitch **Denes Garlic Tablets** then you can continue to give these throughout the pregnancy.

PREPARING FOR WHELPING

Normally pregnancy lasts about 63 days, but there is some considerable variation in the exact length of gestation between individual bitches. You will need to prepare a room for the bitch to whelp in. This needs to be a secluded area familiar to the bitch, away from the commotion of the rest of the house. The floor should be covered in newspaper and the room should contain a large cardboard box to function as a whelping box. As this is likely to become soiled, make sure it can easily be thrown away afterwards. Ensure that there is adequate lighting, which can be dimmed, a heated pad, a supply of hot water and towels. You will also need a thermometer to check your bitch's temperature.

WHELPING

The actual process of whelping can take as little as an hour or as long as 36 hours depending on the age, experience and breed of the bitch. Whelping normally occurs in three stages. Check your bitch's temperature as a guide to the onset of the whelping process. Normal body temperature is 101.5F and a drop to 99F or below is a sure sign that things are under way.

- **First stage**

In the first stage it is not unusual for a bitch to go off her food so do not coax her if she does not want to eat. Vomiting may also occur. Restlessness is a common feature and, given the opportunity, she will attempt to shred paper to make a bed. This stage lasts about 12 hours on average, but can take longer. Towards the end of the first stage, mucus strings may hang down from the vulva, as the plug which seals the womb starts to dissolve away as the cervix dilates.

- **Second stage**

In stage two the puppies are born. They rotate within the womb to allow birth headfirst. Your bitch will start to pant and you will see contractions within the abdomen. As the first puppy starts its outward journey you will probably see a water bag appear at the vulva. This may shrink back inside or burst with a gush of fluid. A puppy should follow shortly. If there appears to be trouble or the contractions stop it would be best to seek veterinary advice or help from an experienced breeder. Ineffectual straining is also cause for concern. Stage two can last up to 30 minutes or even up to an hour at the most. If this stage takes any longer than this, then call help.

Inexperienced bitches are often worried by the birth of their first puppy but as soon as the puppy cries, their maternal instinct takes over. Most bitches will eat the

membranes that surround the puppy and then will tug at the umbilical cord and lick the puppy furiously. This should stimulate the puppy to start breathing. If the bitch fails to do this then you will need to tear away the membranes, then cut or tear the cord carefully. Avoid doing this too close to the umbilicus as you may damage the stomach muscles, causing a hernia to appear. You will then need to hold the puppy upside down to allow fluid to drain from the lungs, wiping away any mucus from the nostrils and mouth. Finally, rub the puppy with a warm towel to stimulate it to breathe.

- **Third stage**

In the third and last stage of whelping the afterbirth or placenta appears. Sometimes this appears with the puppy, although it may appear with the next puppy in line to be born. Make sure that you can account for all the afterbirths. Occasionally it may take up to 24 hours for an afterbirth to appear after the last puppy has been delivered. The afterbirth is very nutritious and the bitch should be allowed to consume at least one if she wishes. This stimulates milk flow and assists contraction of the womb. You may, however, find that your bitch's stools may be watery and dark for a few days afterwards.

USING DENES REMEDIES DURING WHELPING

There are several remedies which are of benefit to your bitch during pregnancy, whelping and for the period afterwards. The most beneficial are:

- **Denes Arnica 30c**

This homeopathic remedy can be used during whelping to help reduce bruising, limit bleeding and to ensure that things go smoothly.

- **Animal Emergency Essence**

This flower remedy can be given during whelping to calm anxious, excited or agitated bitches. It can also be given to weak puppies to help revive them.

THE NURSING PERIOD

Watch your bitch carefully for the first few days after whelping and for the period of her lactation. A vaginal discharge is normal at this stage. It is usually green at the beginning, turning reddish brown in the later stages. This gradually diminishes over a few weeks as things return to normal. Discharges of any other description need veterinary attention.

You will need to ensure that the diet that you are feeding your bitch is satisfactory to meet all her demands. Not only does she have to feed her puppies, but she also has to regain any condition lost during the pregnancy. The exact amount of food she needs will depend upon the litter size, breed and stage of lactation. As a basic guide she will need to eat up to three or four times her normal maintenance ration by the fourth week of lactation. You will probably need to divide her meals into smaller portions to allow her to consume all the food that she requires. Aim to feed foods with a high energy content such as Denes:

Canned foods:

- **Puppy With Chicken plus added herbs**
- **Adult Tripe Mix Rich in Turkey plus added herbs**

Dry foods:

- **Puppy-Growth Rich in Chicken & Rice plus added herbs**
- **Denes Adult OPTIONS complete dry foods**

These recipes are ideal and will help meet the nutritional demands of your bitch. You should continue with any Denes supplements given during pregnancy, including **Denes All-in-One Tablets.**

Other useful Denes fact sheet to read:

- Your New Puppy

If you have any queries concerning your pet's health or feeding problems, you can contact us for free pet care advice by:

- Visiting our website www.denes.com
- Emailing us at info@denes.com
- Calling us on **01273 325364** Mon-Fri, 9am – 12Noon
- Writing to us at:
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