

## PARENTHOOD

If you want your female dog or cat to become pregnant, it is better to plan the breeding rather than let it happen by accident. Planning well in advance of the pregnancy allows you to take all the precautions necessary to help ensure a healthy mother and puppies or kittens.

Also, if you choose the father, you can have some control over certain characteristics, such as health, disposition, and size (thereby precluding the possibility of a difficult delivery or a Caesarean delivery). Some of the most common questions about pet parenthood are answered here.

**HOW OLD SHOULD A FEMALE BE BEFORE SHE IS BRED?** A dog should be in at least her second estrous (heat) cycle. This generally occurs between 14 and 18 months of age. A cat should be at least six months old.

### WHAT MEDICAL PRECAUTIONS SHOULD I TAKE?

- Your female dog or cat should have all recommended vaccines and boosters before breeding.
- About a month before you plan to breed your pet, have a fecal sample examined to be sure she is free of intestinal parasites; this will allow time for worming if your pet is infested. Parasites can unnecessarily stress the mother and certain parasites, such as round worms and hookworms, are passed on to youngsters from the mother during pregnancy.
- Dogs should be tested for heartworms if they are not currently on preventive.
- Your cat should also be tested for Feline Leukemia Virus and bred only if she tests negative. If she tests negative she must be vaccinated against Feline Leukemia Virus.

**HOW WILL I KNOW WHEN MY PET IS PREGNANT?** A medical examination will confirm pregnancy. Allow three to four weeks after breeding before you have her checked. If you suspect pregnancy,

- begin giving her multiple vitamins, such as Pet Tabs.
- feed her a good maintenance diet, have fresh water constantly available and
- make sure she gets enough exercise.

**HOW LONG DOES PREGNANCY LAST?** A cat has a gestation time of 65 days, give or take three days, and a dog's gestation time is 63 days give or take five days.

**HOW WILL I KNOW WHEN LABOR HAS BEGUN?** *Dogs and cats differ in this respect.* Twenty four to 48 hours before onset of labor, your dog's rectal temperature, which you can take yourself, will drop from the normal range of 101° F - 102° F to below 98° F.

- During this time she may exhibit such nesting behavior as looking for a secluded place to whelp.
- The first symptoms of labor are restlessness, panting, and usually loss of appetite. These signs last from one to 24 hours.
- Hard labor is signaled by abdominal straining and pushing.
- The first pup will appear within two hours of the onset of hard labor.
- The time lapse between pups varies from a few minutes to one hour.

*The cat is more secretive when it comes to delivering her young.* There are very few signs of impending labor.

- The search for a nest is probably the best clue of impending labor.
- The time lapse from the first contraction to delivery of the first kitten is usually 5 to 10 minutes and rarely more than 20 minutes.
- Kittens are born between 5 and 20 minutes apart.
- It rarely takes longer than two hours from the onset of labor to the delivery of the last kitten.

**If the time intervals of labor and birthing for your dog or cat are different than those described, contact our office immediately.**

### SHOULD I HELP WITH THE DELIVERY?

There are several things you can do.

- Most kittens and puppies are born enclosed in their fetal membranes. You can help the newborn breathe by tearing the membrane open.
- Make sure the newborns have a clean, dry and warm environment.
- The day after delivery bring the puppies or kittens and mother into our office to be examined. During our examination, the care of the nursing mother and the puppies or kittens will be discussed.

ANY FURTHER QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE CAN BE ANSWERED BY CALLING OUR OFFICE.

**PRACTICE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE, SURGERY AND DENTISTRY**