

Whelping/Dystocia

There are 3 stages of labor. During Stage 1, uterine contractions begin, your dog may appear restless and pace, dig, shiver, pant, or even vomit. This stage can be long, lasting 6 – 12 hours and culminates with the full dilation of the cervix in preparation of the expulsion of a puppy. The 2nd stage is the hard labor stage in which the puppy is expelled. The 3rd stage refers to the expulsion of the placenta and afterbirth.

Puppies are born covered in membranes that must be cleaned away or the pup will suffocate. The mother will bite and lick the membranes away. If she does not do this within 1 – 2 minutes after birth, you must clean the pup for her. Gently remove the slippery covering and rub the pup with a clean towel. Tie the umbilical cord ~ 1/4" from the abdominal wall with a string or dental floss.

Expect 1 pup every 45 – 60 minutes with 10 – 30 minutes of hard straining. It is normal for your pet to rest partway through delivery, and she may not strain at all for up to 3 – 4 hours between pups. If she is seen straining hard for over 1 hour or if she takes longer than a 3 – 4 hour break, a veterinarian should be consulted. Expect some puppies to be born tail first – this is not abnormal for dogs.

Call a veterinarian if:

- 30 – 60 minutes of strong contractions occur with no puppy being produced
- More than 3 – 4 hours pass between pups and you know there are more to be born
- She is obviously in extreme pain
- Vaginal discharge after giving birth should be odorless and may be green, dark red-brown, or bloody and may persist in small amounts for several weeks. There are
- Several postpartum diseases to watch for including:
 - Metritis (inflammation of the uterus) – signs include fever, foul-smelling vaginal discharge, listlessness, loss of appetite, loss of interest in the puppies, and
 - Decreased milk production; signs are usually noted in the first day or two postpartum
 - Eclampsia (low calcium) – signs include restlessness, no interest in the pups, stiff/painful gait, muscle tremors, inability to stand fever, and seizures
 - Mastitis (inflammation of the mammary glands) – signs include swollen, firm, warm mammary glands