



## ABOUT BIRTHING

The vast majority of canine and feline patients can give birth normally, without any assistance. Overall, the goal of birthing is to provide help, when necessary, but to avoid getting in the way, adding discomfort, or harming the neonates.

## TERMINOLOGY

- Whelping: canine birthing process
- Queening: feline birthing process
- Dystocia: either species with difficulty in birthing
- Neonates: newborn puppies and kittens

## BIRTHING PROCESS

**IMPENDING BIRTH** – Approximately 9 weeks after mating (58-72 days in canine, 56-69 days in feline)

- 70% of mothers' body temperatures decrease by more than 1°F within several hours of birth (typically 98-100°F).
- Mothers often exhibit nesting behavior and seeking secluded areas
- Sharp decrease in blood progesterone level.

## BIRTHING

- Once contractions begin:
  - 30 minutes of active contractions without producing a neonate should prompt veterinary examination
    - Canine patients – one puppy should be whelped every 60 minutes or less, with no breaks.
    - Feline patients – may take breaks between kittens.
  - A delay between neonates of more than 4 hours, without contractions and in an undisturbed environment, is abnormal and justifies immediate veterinary evaluation.
- One placenta should be passed for every neonate.
  - This should occur within 15 minutes or less after the neonate is born.
  - The mother may bite to remove the placenta, occasionally eating it (may cause GI upset).
  - It is okay to assist in tying off the umbilical cord with string or dental floss and removing the placenta.
    - The cord needs to be tied off about an inch from the belly wall, then carefully cut with scissors.
- Encourage the mother to clean and care for each neonate, but it is okay to dry off each with a dry soft towel.
  - Using an infant nasal cleaner, it is okay to suck liquid debris from the mouth and nose of each neonate.
  - You may stimulate each neonate during the drying process by rubbing the neonate's belly and back.
- Place each neonate by the mother's abdomen to encourage feeding.

## AFTER BIRTH / POST PARTUM

- Ensure that the mother is eating, behaving normally, and not showing clinical disease (vomiting, diarrhea, etc.).
- Ensure that each neonate can be stimulated and is responsive.
  - Those less responsive might indicate they are not feeding, are cold, or are fading.
- Periods of interest by the mother in neonates and periods of rest are normal.
  - If a mother seems poorly responsive, has difficulty breathing, lacks interest, is weak, or is tremoring, seek veterinary examination.
- Ensure that all neonates are eating and are gaining weight daily.
  - If neonates are failing to gain weight, especially in large litters, the neonate may require supplemental bottle feedings to make up for what they are not eating naturally.
  - Be sure to inspect the mother's mammary glands each day for abnormalities or pain.

## TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- It is highly recommended to get a litter count around 7 weeks of gestation.
- The most common mistake is that caregivers become too involved when it is not necessary.
- Birthing patients prefer to be in a small, quiet, dark room and allowed to exhibit nesting behavior.
- It is normal for some mothers to be protective of her newborns.
  - Do not put yourself in harm's way or allow yourself to get bitten by offering assistance.
  - Always monitor human children when they are around a mother with offspring.