02 · MATING TO BIRTH

PREGNANCY & THE PREGNANT DAM

Whelping preparation *checklist.*

The final two weeks before whelping. Check off each item only when it is genuinely done.

DAM	SIRE	ESTIMATED DUE DATE	COMPLETE THIS LIST BY
			Two weeks before the due date

THE MOST IMPORTANT FIRST

- **Start two weeks ahead**
  Work through the list at least two weeks before the due date, not the week of.
- **Put the last page by the whelping box**
  It says when to call your vet and what to do meanwhile. Fill in its contacts now.
- **Settle the out-of-hours plan now**
  Know which clinic you will use at night and how long the drive takes.

1 Whelping space

6 ITEMS

- [ ] **Quiet, private area chosen**, away from household traffic and other pets.
  Warm and free from drafts, and out of direct sun: not right by a window, a door or a radiator, where the temperature swings.
- [ ] **Whelping box set up**: about 1.5–2 times her body length, with a pig rail about 3–4 in (8–10 cm) off the floor.
  Large enough for her to stretch out; sides low enough for her and high enough to contain the puppies.

BREED SIZE	HER BODY LENGTH (NOSE TO BASE OF TAIL)	BOX, INSIDE MEASUREMENT PER SIDE
Toy / small	about 10–15 in (25–38 cm)	about 15–30 in (38–75 cm)
Medium	about 16–22 in (40–55 cm)	about 24–44 in (60–110 cm)
Large	about 24–30 in (60–75 cm)	about 36–60 in (90–150 cm)
Giant	about 32–38 in (80–95 cm)	about 48–76 in (120–190 cm)

Approximate, based on the body-length rule (1.5–2 × her length from nose to base of tail). Measure your own bitch; she should be able to lie fully stretched out.

- [ ] **Heat source arranged**, with a warm zone and a cooler area for puppies and for her.
  Heat under part of the floor (a heating pad or mat on a low setting, with auto shut-off) is the safest. Heat lamps are debated: they can overheat puppies and are a fire risk. If you use one, hang it securely, heat only one end, and check the temperature at puppy level directly under it.
- [ ] **Bedding**: absorbent base layer (newspaper or pads) with one large piece of non-slip vet bedding on top.
  Not loose towels or blankets: puppies can get tangled, and a dam digging or lying down can crush a puppy hidden underneath. Avoid terry cloth (loops can catch a toe or tail), and choose a color that contrasts with the puppies.

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- [ ] **Temperature checked** at puppy height: about 85–90 °F (29–32 °C) in the warm part of the box, about 75–80 °F (24–27 °C) in the room, for the first week.
  Keep cables out of reach.
- [ ] **Bitch given time** to explore and settle into the space before labor is expected.
  Digging and shredding bedding is normal nesting. Soft blankets let her nest beforehand; remove the loose bedding once the puppies are born.

2 Supplies

10 ITEMS

- [ ] **Clean towels**, plenty of them, plus small pieces of cotton (old sheets cut to hand-towel size).
  For drying puppies, getting a grip at birth and catching each placenta. Whelping uses more than you expect.
- [ ] **Digital thermometer**, for tracking her temperature as the due date approaches.
- [ ] **Whelping log** or notebook, for puppy times, weights and observations.
- [ ] **Weighing scale** that reads in grams or ounces (a kitchen scale works).
  Weigh each puppy at birth, then at 12 and 24 hours.
- [ ] **Puppy-safe disinfectant** for the whelping area.
- [ ] **Emergency supplies** as recommended by your vet: for example a bulb syringe, sterilized scissors, and unwaxed dental floss or clean thread for tying cords.
  Confirm the exact list with your vet, and how to use each item.
- [ ] **Sterile, water-based lubricant**, in case your vet asks you to use it during the birth.
- [ ] **Puppy ID collars** in different colors (soft, adjustable whelping bands), so each puppy's weights and notes go in the right column.
  Check the fit every day: puppies grow fast, and a band that was loose yesterday can be tight today.
- [ ] **Food for her after whelping**: the energy-dense, highly digestible diet she ate in late pregnancy (often a puppy or growth food), plus fresh water within reach of the box.
  Her energy needs rise steeply while she nurses. Keep tempting, easily digested food on hand for the first days. **Do not add calcium supplements** on top of a complete food unless your vet prescribes them: extra calcium in pregnancy or nursing can raise the risk of eclampsia (milk fever).
- [ ] **A lined, warmed carrier** for taking born puppies with you if she has to go to the vet during whelping.
  Wrap any heat source so puppies cannot touch it directly.

3 Contacts and logistics

5 ITEMS

- [ ] **Regular vet's** contact details confirmed, and written on the last page.
- [ ] **Out-of-hours or emergency vet** confirmed separately if different, with the address, on the last page.
- [ ] **Support**: who is available around the due date, plus a backup if your main support is unavailable.
- [ ] **Transport plan** for an emergency vet visit during labor, including how long the drive takes.
- [ ] **A written whelping plan** agreed with your vet: when to call, where to go out of hours, and, for breeds that often have difficult births (flat-faced, short-legged or very small breeds), whether a planned cesarean makes sense.

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4 Records and final checks

5 ITEMS

- [ ] **Due date** confirmed or best-estimated, from your mating dates or a due-date calculator.
- [ ] **Expected litter size** from an X-ray taken from about day 55, written at the top of your whelping log.
  Keep one column for puppies and one for placentas, and tell your vet if any placenta is missing.

  Puppies on X-ray, and date _____
- [ ] **Temperature log started** one week before the due date: rectal temperature two or three times a day (log on the next page).
  Normal for a pregnant bitch is about 99.5–102.5 °F (37.5–39.2 °C). A drop of about 2 °F (1 °C), often to below 99 °F (37.2 °C), usually means labor within 24 hours, but it is easy to miss.
- [ ] **Progesterone log and mating records** on hand, in case anything about timing needs reviewing.
- [ ] **Final pre-whelping vet check** done, with any concerns discussed in advance rather than during labor.

BEFORE YOU FINISH

Ask yourself

- [ ] Have I gone through every item, rather than assuming it is covered?
- [ ] Is every contact on the last page confirmed?

Check with your vet

- [ ] Is there anything specific to my bitch or breed to add?
- [ ] Are the out-of-hours plan and drive time agreed?

Do one thing today

- [ ] Mark what is genuinely done and what is still outstanding.
- [ ] Put the last page beside the whelping box.

COMING SOON · THE COMPLETE EDITION

Ready for the birth? Keep the whole litter in one place.

Whelping Day Checklist – the birth, stage by stage, with what to record at each step.

Whelping Journal & Puppy Charts – one record for the litter: a card for every puppy, growth summaries, and your litters compared side by side.

The free tools cover each step; the Complete Edition joins them up, litter after litter. Everything about when to call your vet stays free.

Get notified first → thebreedercollective.com/guides-tools

SCAN TO JOIN THE LIST

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Temperature log

NORMAL 99.5–102.5 °F (37.5–39.2 °C)

From one week before the due date. Many breeders check every few hours in the last days; use as many rows as you need. A drop of about 2 °F (1 °C), often to below 99 °F (37.2 °C), usually means labor within 24 hours.

DATE	TIME	TEMPERATURE	NOTES (APPETITE, NESTING, DISCHARGE)

SOURCES

1. Merck Veterinary Manual: Labor, Delivery, and Postpartum Care in Bitches and Queens. merckvetmanual.com
2. Merck Veterinary Manual: Dystocia in Small Animals. merckvetmanual.com
3. Cornell University, Riney Canine Health Center: The Normal Whelping Process. vet.cornell.edu
4. Cornell University, Riney Canine Health Center: Dystocia in Dogs: Understanding Difficult Births. vet.cornell.edu
5. Purdue University Center for Animal Welfare Science: Setting Up a Welfare-Friendly Whelping Area. caninewelfare.centers.purdue.edu
6. VCA Animal Hospitals: Whelping in Dogs. vcahospitals.com
7. American Kennel Club: Best Practices for Whelping & Caring for Newborn Puppies. akc.org
8. The Royal Kennel Club: Whelping your first litter and Whelping complications and problems. royalkennelclub.com
9. PDSA: Whelping: a guide to your dog giving birth. pdsa.org.uk
10. The Royal Kennel Club: Feeding mum from whelping to weaning. royalkennelclub.com
11. VCA Animal Hospitals: Eclampsia in Dogs. vcahospitals.com
12. Lopate C (2008), Theriogenology 70:397–402: Estimation of gestational age and assessment of canine fetal maturation using radiology and ultrasonography: a review. therio.org

General information, not veterinary advice. Every bitch and breed is different: agree your plan with your own veterinarian. Read the full guide, with links to every source, at **thebreedercollective.com/whelping-preparation-checklist**.

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WHELPING · WHEN TO CALL ⚠

Call your vet if you see these.

Your vet would rather hear from you early than late.

Call your vet, or the out-of-hours service, **straight away** if you see any of these. If something feels wrong, call.

1 Before labor starts

Call, and have your records ready

WHAT YOU SEE	WHAT IT CAN MEAN	WHAT TO DO WHILE YOU CALL OR TRAVEL
Her temperature dropped and **labor has not started within 24 hours** of the drop	The usual window between the drop and labor has passed.	Call. Have your temperature log ready to read out.
She reaches **about 70 days after the first mating** (or about day 66 from the LH surge)	She is at or past the expected end of pregnancy.	Call. Have your mating and progesterone dates ready.

2 During labor

Note the times as you go

Green or black discharge before the first puppy	Usually a placenta has started to separate, so a puppy may be in distress and short of oxygen. This is an emergency.	Call now. Note the time. Keep her calm and quiet.
Strong straining for 20–30 minutes without a puppy	Forceful, repeated pushing that produces nothing can mean a puppy is too large, badly positioned or stuck.	Call. Note when the strong straining began.
Weak or on-and-off contractions for about 2 hours with no puppy (never wait more than 4 hours)	Not necessarily a problem: many bitches go on to deliver healthy puppies, but the risk grows the longer it lasts.	Call. Your vet may tell you to wait and call back; note the times.
More than about 2 hours between puppies and you know or suspect more are coming	A puppy may be stuck or the uterus tiring. Puppies still inside depend on their placentas until born.	Call. Note when the last puppy came, and count the placentas so far.
A puppy visible at the vulva that does not move on within a few minutes of pushing	The puppy may be too large or badly positioned.	Keep her calm and warm, note the time, call ahead. Do not pull on the puppy unless your vet tells you how.

3 At any time

Before, during or after whelping

Heavy bleeding, or discharge that **smells foul**	Heavy bleeding needs a vet straight away. A foul smell can mean infection or a dead puppy.	Bleeding: go now, keep her still and warm, call the clinic on the way.
Fever above 103 °F (39.5 °C), exhaustion, collapse, repeated vomiting or obvious pain	Signs she is unwell or that labor is not going as it should.	Call now. Note her temperature and when the signs began.

WHILE YOU CALL OR TRAVEL

Do: note every time (straining began, last puppy, placentas). Keep her calm, quiet and warm. Have your temperature log and mating dates by the phone. Call ahead so the clinic expects you.

Go now, then call on the way: heavy bleeding. **Do not** pull on a puppy unless your vet tells you how, and do not wait it out once a sign on this page appears.

MY VET
Name and phone _____

OUT-OF-HOURS VET
Name, phone and address _____

DRIVE TIME
To the out-of-hours clinic _____

TRANSPORT
Car, driver and route _____

MAIN SUPPORT PERSON
Name and phone _____

BACKUP SUPPORT
Name and phone _____

General information to support, not replace, your veterinarian's advice. Agree your own plan with your vet before the due date. Based on our articles When whelping doesn't go to plan: warning signs, When to call the vet during and after whelping and Dystocia, malpresentation, and uterine inertia at thebreedercollective.com.