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Canine And Feline Reproduction

The easiest way to avoid reproductive problems with dogs and cats is to spay them when they are 6 months old. It really is that simple. But it is also important to understand some basic issues concerning reproduction in these species.

Dogs generally have their first heat cycle (referred to as estrus) when they are between 7 and 13 months of age. This is why we recommend spaying at 6 months before they have their first estrus. A dog estrus cycle is generally about three weeks from start to finish. Most dogs have one or two estrus cycles a year.

Cats operate on a very different system. Cats are spontaneous ovulators. That means the cat will come in and out of estrus until they are bred. A cat does not ovulate until they are bred. This is why people complain about a cat screaming and coming in and out of heat for weeks on end.

The average gestation period for a dog or cat is between 63 and 65 days. Most Veterinarians can palpate a fetus at around the 30 day point. Both cats and dogs have a "Y" shaped uterus consisting of the cervix branching off into two horns. It is also important to remember that a litter of puppies or kittens can have more than one father. knowing this fact can prevent some "surprises".

When a dog is preparing to give birth several signs can be observed. An increase in nesting behavior will be seen where the dog is gathering material for a nest or finding a secluded spot. The dog may also stop eating a day or two before the birth. We also recommend clients take the dog's rectal temperature twice daily during the few days leading up to the birthing process. The normal body temperature is between 101 and 102.5 F generally. The dog's temperature will drop below 100 degrees F in the 24 to 48 hour period prior to birthing. Once contractions begin some simple rules should apply. It should not take more than 3 or 4 hours for the first puppy to be born. There should also be no more than three hours between puppies. Some people choose to have the mother radiographed a few days prior to the suspected delivery. This can give a close estimate of the number of puppies present. If at least 5 definite puppies are seen on the radiograph and the mother has 4 puppies and then stops labor then something is wrong.

Cats generally have their kittens at night and prefer a very secluded location. They will often find the most inconvenient place in a close or garage to have their kittens. It is not unusual for a search to be involved in order to find the location. It is certainly not a bad idea to confine the cat to a room days prior to the delivery in order to

limit the cat's options concerning where to have the kittens. Providing a choice of several locations such as a nice laundry basket or cardboard box with towels in a closet may encourage the mother to have her kittens there.

When puppies or kittens are born the mother will clean up the mess on her own usually. She will lick the young, bite the umbilical cord, and eat the placenta. This may result in the mother not wanting to eat food for a couple of days after giving birth. This is normal. The mother may also not want to leave her babies and may be very protective of them. It is a good idea to limit contact with the mother and new babies for at least a day or two after the babies are born.

It is also very important to remember that once a dog or cat is known to be pregnant they should be placed on a high quality puppy or kitten food respectively. This helps in giving added calcium and other nutrients to supply the mother with what she needs to produce an adequate milk supply as well as aid in giving plenty of nutrition for her own well being. The dog or cat should be on the puppy or kitten food until the puppies or kittens are weaned.

As mentioned it is always recommended that a female dog or cat be spayed. It eliminates heat cycles and uterine infections and greatly reduces the chances of breast cancer later in life.