



Pregnancy in Dogs

Overview

- Dogs are pregnant for approximately 63 days (9 weeks).
- While your dog is pregnant you will need to care for her slightly differently and make sure you're prepared for her whelping (giving birth).
- Always contact your vet for advice if your dog gets pregnant, or if you're worried about her at any point during her pregnancy.
- PDSA recommend neutering unless you are certain you want to breed from your dog and know how to do so responsibly.

Signs of pregnancy in dogs



A dog's gestation period (pregnancy) is approximately 63 days/9 weeks, but can vary between 56-72 days.

In the early stages of pregnancy, your dog is unlikely to show many signs other than larger/pinker nipples and a swollen vulva (private parts). However, as her pregnancy progresses, you will start to notice signs such as:

- Weight gain and a firm, round tummy that starts to sag down
- Increased hunger (especially during the second half of pregnancy)
- Mammary gland development and milk (from the 5th week)
- Low energy
- Behavioural changes such as nesting, being quieter than usual, and sometimes aggression (especially around the time of whelping)



How will my vet know if my dog is pregnant?



There are a few ways to check if your dog is pregnant:

- **Examination** - between three and five weeks pregnant, your vet might be able to feel for puppies through your dog's abdomen (belly). However, this can be difficult and isn't the most accurate way to diagnose pregnancy
- **Ultrasound scan** – your vet will be able to scan your dog from around 25 days after mating
- **A blood test** – your vet will be able to run bloods to check for pregnancy from around 25 days after mating

Phantom pregnancy

A false/phantom pregnancy is when a dog feels, acts, and sometimes even looks pregnant when she isn't. False pregnancies are very common in dogs, and are caused by the hormones released after a [season](#).

[Read more about phantom pregnancy in dogs](#)

Caring for your pregnant dog

Feeding

Your dog's appetite will increase a lot during pregnancy, and towards the end of her gestation it's likely that she will be eating around two to three



times more than normal! You will need to feed her a high quality puppy food, or food specifically for pregnant/lactating dogs. The right food will ensure your dog gets all the right nutrients, and reduce her chance of problems such as pregnancy toxæmia, and hypocalcaemia/eclampsia. Ideally feed your dog lots of small meals throughout the day because her womb will be pressing on her stomach making it difficult for her to eat a lot at one time.

Exercise

It's important to keep your dog fit during her pregnancy, but as she gets closer to whelping she won't need or want as much exercise as normal. Let your dog decide how much she wants to do, and allow her to rest if she seems tired - especially in the late stages of her pregnancy.

Worming

Your dog will need to be dewormed more frequently while she's pregnant to prevent her giving worms to her puppies. Always speak to your vet practice for advice before choosing a wormer because not all treatments are licensed for pregnancy.

Problems during pregnancy

With proper care, most dogs experience very few problems during their pregnancy, but there are a few things that you need to be aware of:

Miscarriage (loss of pregnancy)

Miscarriage can be caused by infection, stress, a traumatic event, injury, hormonal problems, or a [difficult birth](#). If a dog loses her pups early on, you may not notice any symptoms because her body will process it internally. However, if she miscarries later on in her pregnancy, it's likely she will experience labour pains, develop a vulval discharge, start producing milk, and in some cases, feel the need to strain and even give birth to the dead puppies. Always contact your vet if you think your dog has had a miscarriage. Until you know the cause, it's a sensible precaution for any pregnant women to avoid touching her (or anything she's been in contact with) in case the cause can also affect humans.

Pregnancy toxæmia

Pregnancy toxæmia is a rare problem that can develop during pregnancy. It's caused by a lack of energy and build-up of toxins in the blood. It tends



to happen in late pregnancy, and is most common in dogs that are underweight, not eating properly, or carrying very large litters. Symptoms of pregnancy toxemia include [low energy](#), weakness, wobbliness, and in severe cases [collapse](#) and [seizures](#). Pregnancy toxemia can be treated easily by your vet but left untreated can be extremely serious.

Other

If you notice any other symptoms of illness during your dog's pregnancy such as [vomiting](#), vaginal discharge, [weight loss](#), or you're worried she just 'isn't quite right', contact your vet for advice.

Whelping (giving birth)

For information about whelping and potential problems after pregnancy, read our article ['Whelping: A Guide To Your Dog Giving Birth'](#).

When to contact your vet

It's always sensible to seek your vet's advice if you think your dog might be pregnant. They will be able to tell you how to keep her happy and healthy during pregnancy, and how to prepare for [whelping](#). It's also important to contact your vet if you are worried about your dog or she becomes unwell at any point during her pregnancy.

Terminating a pregnancy

If your dog is pregnant but you think it's best she doesn't have the puppies, there are options available but it's important to discuss them with your vet as soon as possible. In most cases, it's possible to end the pregnancy by spaying or giving hormone injections.

Should I neuter or breed?

From your dog's point of view, there are no benefits to having puppies – so unless you are certain you would like to breed, you know how to do it responsibly, and are fully prepared regarding the time and costs involved, it's best have her [neutered \(spayed\)](#). Neutering not only prevents unwanted

[Dog neutering - a guide to castration and spaying](#)



pregnancies, it also protects against problems such as phantom pregnancy, [pyometra \(infection of the womb\)](#), ovarian cancer and uterine cancer.

Cost

Treatment for problems during pregnancy can be expensive, especially if your dog needs an emergency caesarean section (which often costs over £1000). If you plan to breed from your dog it's very important to make sure you can afford any problems that may arise, especially because not all pet insurance companies cover breeding related issues. Always speak to your vet openly and honestly about any financial concerns you have.

[Am I eligible for PDSA veterinary treatment?](#)

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