

# HOLMER VETERINARY SURGERY

## Summer 2023 Newsletter

Welcome to our Summer 2023 newsletter. It seems impossible that we are half way through the year already. In the last month we said a sad farewell to Sue. Sue had been with the practice 8 years as part of the office team she will be greatly missed but a huge asset to her new employers. Our newest recruit Seren, who has been with us such a short time, has sadly decided the veterinary nursing career is not for her so is moving on. In August Tia, who has been working in the office, will be moving over to take up the trainee veterinary nurse position, and we will be welcoming Olivia onto our office team. In the practice our new dog ward extension is up and running and we hope to be moving onto the next stage of practice development, building a second op theatre in the near future.

Through the summer it is important to manage your pets exercise walking dogs earlier or later in the day to reduce the risk of heat stroke, ensuring free access to fresh water and shade. Please remember that this is especially important for brachycephalic dogs and older dogs with laryngeal issues who find it harder to regulate their body temperature. If out walking with your dog during the heat of the day remember that it is not only the ambient temperature that can make them unwell but the heat of the ground can damage their feet. Be aware of warning signs for blue-green algae in stagnant pools as ingestion of this can lead to life threatening organ damage. If your dog starts to manically lick their feet or shake their head this could be a sign of a grass seed, if you look and cannot find anything but the signs persist then please get them seen by a vet. As always our veterinary surgery offers a 24hr service to registered clients giving advice and support as well as appointments for routine and emergency veterinary care.

For this newsletter we continue to look at pregnancy and whelping in dogs. Secondly we will consider the difficult issues of managing aggressive dogs.

# Pregnancy and whelping in dogs (part 2)

## Stage 1

The bitch will be restless, panting and may start to look for somewhere a bit quieter and out the way. This stage will last around 6- 12 hours, but can be up to 24hrs. It is essential to keep an eye on her but also give her some space to avoid stressing her out. Some bitches seek out their owners for reassurance and are more settled if they/you are present. For bitches who prefer to be left alone cameras can be used to closely monitor their progress remotely. If the bitch does not progress to stage 2 within 24hrs (primary inertia) or a green discharge is seen at her vulva (indicating placental separation) call for emergency veterinary assistance.

## Stage 2

The second stage of whelping is when abdominal contractions start. The bitch may have shivers, look at her side and start cleaning herself. Sometimes a water bag may be seen at her vulva. When the bitch starts to push the puppies will start to move into the canal and born. The puppy will then be expelled in the membrane which will usually rupture as the puppy is born, or be burst by the mother soon after, if the membrane is not broken the puppy can drown in the fluid so it is important to monitor and assist with the membrane rupture if necessary. Puppies can be safely delivered forward or backwards. If the bitch is pushing unproductively for 30 minutes, has only weak contractions or is going more than 2 hours between puppies being born this could indicate dystocia or secondary inertia call for emergency veterinary assistance.

## Stage 3

The placenta will then be passed with the puppy or shortly after. It should arrive around 5- 15 minutes after the puppy if not with. However, do not panic about trying to count placentas as the bitch will often ingest them, they are full of nutrients.

The whelping will go between stage 2 and stage 3 with each puppy that's born. The time period can vary depend on the litter size. An average whelping may be 4- 8 hours however it can be up to a whole 24 hours!



If at any time the bitch becomes weak or unwell during whelping call for emergency veterinary assistance.

## What can you do to help ensure the whelping goes as smoothly as possible?

- Ensure the environment is kept as stress free as possible.
- Ensure you supervise her as soon as she goes in to stage 1 so you can be aware should any issues arise.
- Keep a record of each puppy (their features, abnormalities, weight etc).
- Offer her fluids throughout but not too much food should she require a caesarean. (Vanilla ice cream can be given to the bitch to help prevent her blood glucose levels dropping and the calcium will help keep contractions strong, as long as she is not known to be lactose intolerant).
- Ensure the puppies are dried off and kept warm as they can suddenly get very cold when the bitch passes fluids.
- Ensure the puppies suckle as soon as possible to get the vital colostrum which is full of nutrients and antibodies. The suckling will also stimulate the bitch to produce further oxytocin and continue whelping further pups.
- Ensure the bitch has regular toilet breaks, this can help the puppies to drop. (Take a towel in case a puppy passes and a torch if its dark!)

## Post whelping care

### Puppies

Weigh the puppy's- small breeds should be between 75g- 350g, medium breeds 200g-300g and larger breeds 400g- 800g. They should be nice and pink in colour. Check for a cleft palate and put your finger in their mouth to check for a suckle reflex.

Weigh puppies daily to check they are gaining weight, if the litter is large or the mother has limited milk some of all of the puppies may require supplementary feeding with a milk replacer. A well fed puppy will be content and calm between feeds, if a puppy is crying a lot this may be because it is hungry /not feeding properly. If the pup will not latch or take milk replacement seek the advice of a vet. The bitch should lick the puppies bottoms after to feeding them to stimulate them to defecate, if you need to support their feeding you will also need to mimic the mothers cleaning to keep them toileted.



### Bitch

- Check mum has adequate milk supply. Check mammary glands regularly to monitor for signs of mastitis or infections (heat, pain firmness or bloody milk).
- Take her out to the toilet.
- Clean her back end and replace soiled bedding with clean.
- Avoid touching the puppies excessively as this can stress out the bitch.
- Keep an eye on discharge. You will notice reddish/ brown discharge for a few days/ weeks during which time it should gradually become clearer. If it the discharge becomes dark smelly discharge she will need to be seen by a vet as this could indicate an infection.
- Offer her fresh food and water. The bitch will require more calories during lactating, specialist diets are available.

It is essential to supervise the bitch and puppies especially if it is her first litter as she may require assistance to feed and may not be maternal. In extreme, although thankfully rare cases, a bitch with poor maternal instincts will attack her puppies, if this occurs they will need to be removed from her and hand reared.

If you have any concerns that the bitch or puppies are unwell please seek veterinary advice promptly.

In our next newsletter we will look at caring for growing puppies including preparing them for going to a new home.

## Managing dangerous behaviour

Sadly, the number of dog attacks on people has been increasing over the last couple of years. Whilst aggressive behaviour in dogs is predominantly seen as the result of the dogs inappropriate response to fear or anxiety, it can be very difficult to manage, even with appropriate help and the risk that they pose to their owners and the general public can be significant.

The first step to trying to address dangerous behaviour is to have a consult with a vet so that they can examine your dog to rule out underlying health issues. It is then important to have an open and honest discussion with the vet so that they can advise on the most appropriate course of action. These consultations will take longer than a normal consult and will incur a higher cost as a result.



Unfortunately, there is no easy fix or magic advice to correct problem behaviour, for most dogs it will be recommended to seek advice from a suitable qualified behaviourist for an assessment and formulation of a behaviour modification plan. As with referral to any veterinary specialist an owner must understand that they need to be prepared to accept the financial and time commitment of helping rehabilitate their pet, behavioural therapy does not have a quick fix. Sometimes the behaviourist will recommend medication alongside the behaviour modification plan to help implement it and improve the dog's response. It is very important to stress that medication on its own will have little to no impact, it is only used, usually temporarily, as an adjunct to a carefully prepared, individualised, behaviour modification plan. The behaviourists we recommend have appropriate qualifications and are assessed and regulated by the Animal Behaviour and Training Council (ABTC), they are different from a dog trainer who generally do not have qualifications in animal behaviour. Anyone can set themselves up as a dog trainer, sadly at this time this area on its own is not regulated. It is also important to recognise that some dog training techniques when used on an anxious dog can make the behavioural problems worse.

Rehoming is a potential option for some but not all dogs who have shown aggressive behaviour, some dogs may be considered for training with police. Unfortunately, it is too often not possible to rehome who have shown aggression. For dogs who do not improve with treatment or pose an ongoing significant or escalating risk, euthanasia may sadly be the most appropriate option. We here at Holmer will always try our best to help owners find a solution, however in the difficult circumstance where euthanasia is determined to be the best/only option for the dog, we will support owners through that process as best we can.