

- Dogs—care

Milk fever (eclampsia) in dogs

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YOU have kept your bitch healthy all through her pregnancy and now she has successfully delivered her pups (hopefully).

It is very important to monitor the health of not only the pups but also the bitch after whelping.

Her nutritional requirements will be higher than before pregnancy, as she is also providing nutrition for her pups.

The best nutrition you can give your bitch is puppy food.

This is high in energy and has the correct balance of all your dog's necessary vitamins and minerals.

A puppy diet should be commenced in the last four weeks of gestation to ensure the bitch is adequately prepared for high energy demands of lactation.

If you are concerned at all about the health of your bitch after whelping it is important to get her to your vet as soon as possible.

There are several illnesses that can occur after whelping including milk fever (eclampsia), mastitis (an infection in the breast tissue) and infection in the uterus.

Milk fever can occur days to weeks after whelping.

It is caused by low calcium levels and is a life-threatening illness requiring immediate veterinary attention.

The main symptoms you initially may notice are restlessness and trembling, but the condition can deteriorate to collapse, seizures and death.

It is important to get your bitch to a vet as quickly as possible for treatment if you suspect milk fever.

Your vet will need to confirm the diagnosis and begin immediate treatment (including providing calcium).

If treatment is provided promptly, the bitch will usually make a rapid recovery.

Depending on the age of the pups at the time, it may be recommended to take the pups off the bitch for 24 hours (they will need to be bottle fed) or wean them permanently.

The bitch will also likely be put on an oral calcium supplement to keep her levels up for the rest of lactation.

Do not supplement your bitch with calcium during pregnancy - in some cases this can be the cause of milk fever.

Good nutrition is the key to minimising the chances of your bitch developing clinical signs.

Speak to your vet for further advice on care of your bitch during pregnancy and in the post-whelping period.