BUNDLES OF JOY
Helping your pet with the mating and birthing process

The decision to allow your cat or dog to produce a litter is an important one, requiring thoughtful consideration of appropriate pre and postnatal care for your pet and its offspring. To insure that your pet receives the best possible care you can give, please read the following information and call your veterinarian with any questions you might have.

The gestation period in cats and dogs is approximately 60 – 65 days. This time reference is important for a number of reasons. Prior to pregnancy the female needs to be current on all vaccinations, as antibodies are passed from the mother to her offspring through the placenta and milk. These antibodies provide protections kittens and puppies need to fight off disease in those critical first weeks of life. A procedure known as vaginal cytology can be performed to determine the state of estrus, or heat, the female is in so that optimum mating can occur. In addition, ultrasound and radiographs can assist in determining number of puppies/kittens as well as viability.

It is advised that your female be placed on Hills Science Diet Growth one month prior to delivery. This diet is high in essential vitamins and minerals, such as calcium and phosphorus, which can be rapidly depleted in the expectant female, causing undue stress upon her and the litter. Moderate exercise is recommended during pregnancy, gradually reduced as the due date approaches. Approximately one week before delivery, your pet's rectal temperature may be monitored twice daily. The normal range of temperature for both cats and dogs is 100.5 degrees Fahrenheit to 101.5. Cats may be less receptive to temperature monitoring and may not respond as well. When the female's temperature drops to 98 – 99 degrees, whelping is likely to begin within 24 hours. A whelping box should be provided, though not all pets will use one, and should be placed in a low traffic area that is dark and quiet. Resist the temptation to place it where you can easily see the puppies or kittens, as your female will instinctively seek out a secluded area. The box should be tall on three sides, with one side lower to allow the mother can get in and out easily, but keep the young contained. Familiarize your pet with the location of the box.

Once whelping begins, it is best not interfere in any way unless unforeseen problems occur. Otherwise docile pets may bite should you attempt to intervene unnecessarily. Key problems to watch for are prolonged amounts of time (30 – 45 minutes) between puppies or kittens, excessive pushing and straining, a mother that does not immediately begin caring for the little ones, or a sustained temperature of 98 – 99 degrees for the mother 24 hours after birthing. If these or any additional problems occur throughout the process, please call our office immediately at 234-7333 (day or night) so that staff can adequately prepare for an emergency.

If the pups need tails docked and dewclaws removed, it is best to have done by your veterinarian at 1 – 3 days of age as the procedure becomes more extensive if done much later. A post-partum exam for the mother and her litter can be performed at the same time. During the exam, puppies and kittens are checked for any congenital defects, such as cleft palate along with general health.

Weaning of the new ones typically start at around three weeks of age. Pie tins work well during this process, using one pie tin for every couple kittens or puppies. Try to space the most competitive of the litter apart from the remaining litter. The most appropriate diet at this age is a gruel consisting of canned canine/feline growth and water. The offspring should be fully weaned by four weeks.

Vaccinations for the puppies or kittens are given at six weeks of age. Vaccinations for puppies include canine distemper, Parainfluenza and canine parvovirus. Kittens are vaccinated for feline distemper, calicivirus and pneumonitis. Puppies and kittens are a lot of work, but tremendously rewarding as well. We wish you and your pet the best of luck!