

BREEDER BOOKLET NO. 6

PREGNANCY





BREEDER BOOKLETS

This is the sixth in a series of booklets developed to support the successful breeding of racing greyhounds.

Booklet 1: Thinking About Breeding Greyhounds

Booklet 2: Developing a Breeding Program – Understanding Genetics

Booklet 3: Starting a Breeding Program

Booklet 4: Care and Husbandry in the Breeding Environment

Booklet 5: Reproductive Anatomy - Getting Pregnant

Booklet 6: Pregnancy

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1.0 PREGNANCY AND CARING FOR YOUR PREGNANT FEMALE

It is important that you give your pregnant greyhound excellent care during pregnancy to ensure that it is uneventful.

First, you will want to establish if she is pregnant ('in whelp'). A female dog (including a greyhound) has the same hormone cycle after being in heat whether she is pregnant or not. This means initially it can be difficult to tell if she is pregnant or is not pregnant but having a 'pseudo', 'false' or 'phantom' pregnancy.

It is quite normal for a female who is not pregnant, and who may not have even been mated, to appear as though she is pregnant, putting on weight and producing milk. She may even display the behaviours associated with starting to give birth ('whelping') such as digging a nest or mothering things. So, it is not reliable to use behaviour, teat development, or even weight gain as indicators of pregnancy. Instead, there are several techniques to determine if a female is pregnant. There is no real way to tell within the first few weeks of the pregnancy, but once the female reaches the third week it may be possible for an experienced person to palpate (feel) her gently and feel the pregnancy (enlarged uterus).



Image: Ultrasound image of early pregnancy in breeding female Source: www.pyrehayesvets.co.uk/UltrasoundPregnancyChecks1504

Another, more reliable, way to see if your female is pregnant is to have her abdomen examined by ultrasound (similar to humans). Ultrasound is the preferred method of pregnancy detection as you can see the pups and it is sometimes possible to get an idea of the number of pups to expect. With ultrasound the heartbeat of the pups can be seen from about day 28 of the pregnancy. X-rays can be used to detect pregnancy, but not until the last week or so

when the bones inside the pups start to calcify. An x-ray is often used to check for any remaining pups if a female is having problems during whelping, or to determine litter size in the case of small litters.

The length of a pregnancy from the time of ovulation is approximately 9 weeks.

1.1 FEEDING AND NUTRITION OF THE PREGNANT FEMALE

When deciding on the correct food to feed your female greyhound before and during pregnancy, a discussion with your veterinarian or your mentor is a great place to start. They can advise if what you are planning on feeding is likely to meet the requirements of that particular time of life and can suggest more suitable diets where a deficiency is detected. Your veterinarian can also discuss the frequency and quantity to feed and assess your breeding greyhound's individual body condition and needs. When you have large litters or pups that are not good at suckling, or the mother is not producing enough milk, you need to decide under veterinary direction an appropriate supplement for feeding pups.

Of course, there are going to be times when you have a greyhound that goes off her food and refuses to eat or becomes ill and loses condition. You should act on lack of appetite and may need to have your greyhound examined by your veterinarian to ensure that any underlying medical conditions are diagnosed and treated. However, it is quite common for pregnant greyhounds to be fussy eaters at some point in their pregnancy and it is worth spending a little time finding out what they want to eat. Offering her things such as canned tuna, cooked meat or even roast chicken may get her starting to eat again.

What you feed your greyhound is critical to ensuring she has the required nutrients, vitamins and minerals to maintain the pregnancy and be healthy. Pregnant females also need to have the nutrients for the growth of the developing pups during pregnancy and to be able to produce milk for their newborn litter. At each stage of development, from birth to old age, the nutritional needs of the greyhounds in your care will be changing, and you need to make sure you are feeding a diet that meets these demands. Of course, they also need access to fresh, clean water at all times.

All adult greyhounds need to be fed at least once every day, pregnant and lactating females must be fed at least twice daily, or under instruction from a veterinarian. The diet that they are fed needs to be complete (all of the required nutrients present) and balanced (all of the nutrients in the right proportions to each other). There are many commercial diets on the market, with variations in price and quality. There are also



home-cooked or raw diets that can be suitable provided that they are formulated in such a way to ensure they are complete and balanced.

A pregnant and lactating female has increased nutritional requirements as she is not only maintaining her own body functions but is also providing nutrients to the developing pups during pregnancy and providing nutrients in the form of milk when they are feeding. This places huge demands on her body, especially if she has a large litter. Special care needs to be taken to ensure her specific needs are met with the amount, type and frequency of food that is offered, so that she does not lose body condition as she draws on her own stores of nutrients to make up for things lacking in her diet.

In the early stages of pregnancy, it is important not to overfeed your female. She should continue to eat a well-balanced diet. In these early stages, it is reasonable to allow your greyhound to be a little heavier than when she was being raced, and this compensates for those periods where she becomes fussier with her food. Of course, her weight will gradually increase over time as the pups grow. If her diet is nutritionally balanced and complete, she will have no problems growing pups. However, if you overfeed her, she will put on too much weight and this can make giving birth more difficult.



An unbalanced diet will not provide the female and growing pups with vital nutrients. Over supplementation of certain elements can be as problematic as a diet that is lacking in essential nutrients. In particular over-supplementation with calcium during pregnancy can contribute to a serious condition known as 'milk fever' when the female has whelped.

As the female moves into the latter stages of the pregnancy, her intake of food will need to increase, but you may have to increase the number of meals each day, rather than increase the amount in each meal. This is because the pups will be taking up much of the space in her abdomen and this leaves less room for the stomach to expand. If you are feeding a dry kibble, you may choose to gradually change the female over to a pup formula as these are more energy dense and tend to have slightly higher levels of protein and calcium.

It is important that you take the time to consult your veterinarian or mentor about what you should be feeding.

1.2 EXERCISE

It is important that your female continues to exercise regularly. Fit, healthy muscles are necessary to assist the whelping process. She should have some exercise every day, although the amount may decrease as she gets nearer to her due date. If it is summer time, make sure she exercises in the cooler parts of the day, rather than in hot weather, as you want to avoid extremes of temperature.

Early in her pregnancy, it is quite safe to run the female with other dogs, provided they are compatible, but as she gets to the more advanced stages of pregnancy, she probably will not want to be bumped and jostled with, so you might prefer to exercise her on her own.



1.3 OTHER CARE

It is important to remember that a pregnant greyhound can have increased susceptibility to disease and illness as her body adapts. Minimising the risks is therefore essential and a clean, hygienic environment is important to maintain.

It is also important to make sure your female is up to date with all her worming and parasite treatments as this will reduce the transfer to pups. Pregnant females should be wormed regularly during pregnancy so talk to your veterinarian about this. Before using any product or medication on your female, read the label carefully to ensure that is safe to use during pregnancy. If you are not sure, ask your veterinarians for one that is safe to use.

If your greyhound does become unwell, be very careful that any necessary treatments are safe.

There are some drugs that should never be administered to pregnant females because they may affect the unborn pups, while other medications may cause her to abort the pups. Always make sure that your veterinarian is aware that your female is pregnant, and do not administer any medications yourself unless your veterinarian agrees it is appropriate.

Early recognition that your greyhound is unwell will ensure that they are seen as quickly as possible, to ensure they have the best chance of being treated and returning to normal in a short amount of time. Being observant and checking your greyhound regularly is the best way of detecting the early signs of illness or disease.

The key to knowing whether your greyhound is unwell is first knowing what they look like when they are feeling well. Every greyhound is different, and some are more stoic than others, so you need to make sure that you watch them closely whenever you are interacting with them or are in a position to observe them. Healthy greyhounds are active, have a normal appetite, and behave in a 'normal' manner.

Often the first indicator that your greyhound is unwell will be changes to their behaviour. They may move around less than normal, not want to interact with people, or may just sit in their bed. They may display behaviours they would not normally display or do something that is 'normal' but do it repeatedly or to an excessive amount - maybe for example shaking their head, pawing at their mouth, shivering, or licking repeatedly at the one place. They may be reluctant to eat, or eat less than they normally would, or may be drinking increased amounts of water.

Sometimes a greyhound that is unwell will have changes that you can see - for example, do they have any swelling? Or areas on their skin that are red or where their hair has fallen out? Is one of their eyes partially closed? Or do they have discharge where normally there is none? Are they able to stand and walk normally? What about their pen, cage or enclosure - are there signs of vomiting or unusual faeces?

If you observe anything unusual, you need to investigate further, but be careful when you examine a greyhound that looks unwell - keep yourself safe. Greyhounds, like any animal that is in pain, or who have altered senses can startle easily, and may react aggressively to try to get away from the pain. Make sure that you wash your hands thoroughly after handling any greyhound that looks unwell, and do not simply move to the next pen or enclosure before consulting your health management plan.

It is important to document any signs of illness, even if they turn out to be nothing, as it may be later that a more serious problem develops. You will need to know which greyhounds have been unwell recently. People who are observing or caring for your greyhound need to be instructed on how to document and report any greyhounds that are unwell. They also need to understand that greyhounds that are unwell are a matter of priority.

All greyhounds that are injured or unwell should be examined by a veterinarian who will determine whether the greyhound needs to be treated, quarantined or observed for changes. Pregnant greyhounds need to be seen as soon as possible, as illness can develop quickly, and may impact not only on her, but also her pups.

Extra information may also be required to comply with any relevant racing rules and/or Code of Practice.

Start to think about care, nutrition and exercise for the pregnant female as part of your breeding program planning.



BREEDERS CHECKLIST

- ☐ Make sure you continue to talk with your veterinarian
- ☐ Provide proper nutrition, exercise and care for your pregnant female
- ☐ Monitor your pregnant female for any signs of change or indications that she might be unwell





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Greyhound Racing Victoria

Published 2022

