Proper nutrition is important for optimizing outcome of pregnancy and lactation. Late gestational growth of puppies and kittens and lactation are the most demanding nutritional periods in a bitch’s/queen’s life.

During the first half of pregnancy, the normal diet should be fed, ideally a good quality commercial dog/cat food that is AAFCO approved. No increase in calories or nutrients is necessary until the second half of pregnancy. Once pregnancy is confirmed at approximately 30 days gestation, a diet appropriate for all life stages (including puppies/kittens) should be fed (make a gradual transition from the regular diet). The amount fed should be increased approximately 25% each of the last 4 weeks of gestation. If the bitch/queen starts to get fat, this amount should be reduced slightly. Multiple smaller meals a day may be necessary rather than one or two large meals.

After whelping/queening, the bitch/queen may need to be fed in her box, near her pups. Many bitches/queens will not leave their pups/kittens to eat normally. The demands of lactation normally increase a bitch’s/queen’s appetite significantly. The typical caloric requirement of late lactation is twice the normal requirement. If diarrhea occurs, it may be from the large volume of food the bitch/queen is eating, and reducing the amount slightly may help. Sometimes, bacterial overgrowth occurs as a consequence of ingesting a large volume of food, and a course of antibiotics is indicated. Safe antibiotics for nursing bitches/queens include ampicillin, amoxicillin, clavamox and cephalexin. After weaning, the amount of food a bitch/queen gets should be reduced based on her condition (does she need to regain normal weight?) and the variety returned to her normal diet.
New information is becoming available from nutritional research suggesting that earlier changes in diet may optimize litter size and puppy/kitten viability. Ask your veterinarian if earlier switch to a diet appropriate for all life stages, or addition of essential fatty acids at the time of breeding is appropriate for your pet.

A diet formulated for all life stages, including puppies, is adequate in minerals and vitamins for pregnancy and nursing, and should not be further supplemented. Be sure to check with your veterinarian about any supplements or medications being given to your bitch, before giving them in pregnancy.