



A PREGNANT WOMAN'S BEST FRIEND

A few months back I noticed our dog, Nanook starting to behave a little more peculiar than usual.

Truth is, he's always been a bit of a sook, with those big dark expressive eyes of his and his puppy dog pout.

His personality shifted though and he became very protective of me. Whilst lying on the couch of an evening, Nanook would cutch up next to me; 45kg of love and fur almost breaking my legs in the process of getting comfortable. While falling asleep with one eye open, Nanook would growl if either my partner or our kids would look at me, God forbid come close to my person. It was very out of character for him as he had always been so gentle and docile.

Living in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales, we are fortunate enough to have some very beautiful bush-walks in our area, which Nanook and I often visit. Usually, once he's off his lead he runs for gold and won't return until he's called, but I noticed another change regarding this; when allowed to run free in the bush he would return within a minute to sniff me, almost as if checking to make sure I was okay. I felt like I had a 24/7 security guard.

Time went on and we found out a crucial piece of information which made sense of all these changes; I was pregnant. Knowing how exceptional a dogs senses are, I researched a little more into whether dogs may be able to sense a human pregnancy and, of course I found that they can.

Dogs are gifted with an acute sense of smell. The human to dog smell ratio is at least 1:100 and can even show as much disparity as 1:1,000,000 with some dogs. Possessed of senses that powerful, it's no wonder that dogs are able to smell diseases such as cancer or detect the onset of an epileptic fit.

When a woman becomes pregnant her body chemistry changes. This causes her scent to change, which is a clear indicator to a dog who is familiar with your usual natural musk that something is up.

Other factors come into play also, such as recognising the change in movement for a pregnant woman. She is slower to get up and move around and needs more rest than usual to support the demands of her growing baby. Dogs can acknowledge these changes and respond accordingly.

They're pretty good at reading moods too, being able to detect your body language and read your facial expressions. Have you ever noticed your dogs behaviour when you're feeling unwell or sad? Do they comfort you? Or when you are angry about something, does your dog give you the space you need? When you put on your walking shoes, does your dog jump around like he's got ants in his pants, knocking everything over in his path, including you?

There are no greater companions to have around than a dog; they are gentle and perceptive to our moods and movements and they communicate without the use of words. Yet, their messages are often so very clear to us and they love us unconditionally. They are the rarest of gifts.

Thankfully, our dog has stopped hassling my partner and our two children when they come near me. I think he's a little more used to the idea.

I feel very fortunate to have this dog in my life right now. When I'm out on long walks, I know that I'll be okay if he is with me. Even if I'm just out in the garden working, I know that if I needed him to help me, he would. He provides comfort and security through my experience and I don't know if there are two things more important to the needs of a pregnant woman. ■