



CARE OF THE PREGNANT QUEEN

The normal length of pregnancy in cats is 65 days (9 weeks) although this can vary by a couple of days either way. The time period is estimated from the last day of mating (if known).

DURING PREGNANCY OWNERS SHOULD ENSURE :

- 1. ADEQUATE EXERCISE –***
Queens can exercise normally for the first 35 days. Taper off exercise as birth approaches (this is usually self-regulated).
- 2. FEEDING –***
Feed the queen her normal diet for the first 6 weeks of pregnancy. You may need to feed the pregnant queen 2 to 3 times per day in late pregnancy. Be careful to avoid over-fatness or obesity. Pregnant queens have increased requirements for protein & vitamins as well as energy in later pregnancy. These requirements will continue until the kittens are weaned. Often queens will lose their appetite just before giving birth.
- 3. PARASITE CONTROL –***
Regular worming, especially for roundworms & hookworms is important. Continue regular insecticidal control for fleas, but be sure to check the product is safe for use in pregnant queens.
- 4. PREPARE A SUITABLE AREA –***
This should be warm, dry & clean. Shredded newspaper is ideal. Don't put the queen into the area until just before she's due or she will contaminate the area with worms & fleas. Get the area ready about 5 to 7 days before she's due (be aware though, that even though an area is prepared for her, she may not use it). It is better to keep her indoors when she is getting close to birthing, as some cats may find an obscure place outside to have the kittens, so it can be very difficult for you to find where she has hidden them.
- 5. CLIPPING –***
Very long haired cats may need to be clipped along the abdomen & around the back end before giving birth.
- 6. DRUGS –***
Check with your Vet if unsure about the effects of administered drugs to your cat.

WHELPING

She may refuse all food for about 24 hours before delivery & become restless. If she has not already done so, she will "nest" in a whelping area by rummaging & tearing up paper. She may also start pacing, looking at her flanks / belly or vomit.

Most Cats are capable of whelping with no help, although it is best to keep a distant eye on them to watch out for problems. Avoid interfering too much or having a crowd of people watching. This can distract her

from the job at hand. She usually lies on her side or front to deliver, & contractions of her uterus carry a kitten to the cervix & into the vagina. The water bag that surrounds the kitten bursts & fluid flows from the vulva. The bag may bulge through the vulva before bursting, & looks like a dark bubble. This bag bursts by itself, or from the mother licking it. The head & legs of the kitten should appear shortly after, & the whole kitten delivered within a few minutes.

The mother should then lick away the membranes surrounding the kitten & bite the umbilical cord. She will lick the kitten clean, in turn stimulating it to breathe & sometimes cry. The kitten will then search for a nipple. Kittens may be born head & sometimes tail first, both presentations are normal. Each one has it's own placenta. After the birth of each one you should observe to see that the placenta comes out with the kitten, or soon after. Keep a count of how many placentas come out – they should equal the amount of kittens born. A retained placenta can cause a serious infection within the uterus. The cat may eat the placenta, which is normal but may cause her to vomit.

Most cats deliver every 15 to 30 minutes after the first, but this can vary & tends to get longer as labour continues. An interval of 1 hour between kittens is not uncommon in larger litters, as the muscles of the uterus become tired & contractions become weaker & less frequent.

COMPLICATIONS :

If the cat bites the umbilical cord too cleanly instead of chewing, the cord may bleed. If so tie the cord with a piece of sterilised (previously boiled or soaked in antiseptic solution) thread, about 6cm from the kitten's body. Then cut with sterilised scissors between the placenta & the thread you have just tied. This can also be done if the mum does not attend to the cord at all (quite unusual).

If the mum does not lick the membranes off the kitten you must clear them from the kitten's head as soon as possible, to allow it to breathe. Then present the kitten to mum to coax her into cleaning it & chewing the cord, if she does not respond within a few minutes you must tie off & cut the cord as explained previously. If the kitten is partly out but is not completely delivered within a few minutes you may need to help her. Do this by pushing the lips of the vulva back & over the partially emerged kitten, a little pressure applied just below the cat's anus will often stop the kitten from slipping back into the vagina. Being very careful, as kittens are delicate, grasp as much of the kitten as you can with a piece of clean towelling & *GENTLY* pull downwards & out. Avoid pulling on one leg only & attempt to pull with the cat's pushing efforts. If the kitten is stuck gently rock or rotate the kitten as you pull.

If it is not breathing clear any membranes away from the mouth & rub it briskly with a towel. This mimics the action of the mum's licking. If still not breathing the mucus in the throat will need to be cleared, this is done by holding the kitten firmly with both hands & supporting the head – then "swinging" the kitten in a downward half circle. Start with the kitten held high above your head, with it's head away from you & keeping your arms straight "swing" the kitten down to your knees. If it is still not breathing after swinging it several times and rubbing with a towel, mouth to nose resuscitation can be performed. This is done by puffing *VERY GENTLY* into the kitten's nose & mouth until the chest begins to lift, do not blow hard as this can rupture the lungs. Persist with this for about 10 to 15 minutes before admitting defeat.

WHEN TO CALL THE VET :

- If the mum is straining for more than 2 hours without any kitten present.
- The membrane has ruptured, releasing fluids, but no kitten is delivered within 30 minutes.

- There is over 2 hours between kittens being born.
- The mum is not straining at all.
- She goes over 65 days pregnancy.
- She is lethargic or unwell.

AFTER Birth :

Kittens cannot control their body temperature so while the mum is delivering other kittens, keep them warm nearby but do not put them on a direct heat source. A warm water bottle covered with towels is ideal. Between delivery of kittens, put them on the mother to feed as the first milk “colostrum” is rich in antibodies to help their immune system.

After the birth it is best if the mother & kittens are checked over by your Vet to make sure there are no remaining pups or membranes inside the cat, or any deformities of the kittens.

Be sure to feed the lactating cat plenty of food as producing milk takes a lot of energy. Feed her a good quality kitten food several times a day. Make sure all the kittens are sucking properly & are getting their fair share ! Watch out for the mum’s breasts becoming swollen, hot or discoloured – this may be mastitis (inflammation of the mammary glands) & will need to be checked by your Vet.

Also watch out for anything wrong with the mum, such as twitching, staggering or shaking as a low level of calcium in the blood can cause this & she will need *IMMEDIATE* veterinary attention. Calcium supplements can be used during lactation, but if her main diet is a good quality cat or kitten food she should not need it.

Generally the cat will let her kittens know when she has had enough of their suckling and will start to push them away by about 3-4 weeks, at this point you will need to supplement them with semi-solid food (eg: wet kitten food from the supermarket) while they are still partly suckling their mum. At about 5-6 weeks, you can change this food gradually to a kitten dry food (you can soak the dry food in warm water until sloppy to help them eat it).

The kittens must be wormed regularly, particularly for roundworms because most kittens are born with them. Worming is recommended for the kittens against roundworm & hookworm every 2 weeks from birth until 12 weeks of age. A suitable product for kittens should be used, a liquid wormer or paste is easier to give at a very young age. Kittens should have their first vaccination at 8 weeks of age.