

CARE OF THE PREGNANT QUEEN

How to Tell if Your Cat is Pregnant

The first thing you need to know about cat pregnancy is how to recognize the signs of pregnancy. You [can tell a cat is pregnant](#) once her nipples become darker and enlarged. This usually happens around the third week of pregnancy. You'll also be able to tell by her size and weight, since pregnancy tends to cause a noticeable gain in weight.

What is a Female Cat Called When Pregnant?

A pregnant or nursing cat is referred to as a queen, and you might agree that she is becoming more demanding as she progresses through her pregnancy. She may become increasingly vocal, meowing for attention, affection, and comfort, or because of discomfort from the growing weight of her abdomen and false labour contractions. Later in the pregnancy, expect your little queen to be hungry most of the time, and napping the rest of the time. The kittens, by the way, once they are born, are called an intrigue of kittens.

How Long Are Cats Pregnant?

The average cat pregnancy lasts 65 to 69 days. This may not seem very long, until you take into account the human-to-cat aging ratio. If a cat's yearly age is determined by multiplying seven (a rough estimate, to be sure), then a cat pregnancy is really 14 months long.

How Many Kittens and Litters Can a Cat Have?

Knowing just how many kittens to expect can be helpful for preparation. A cat can have an average of four to six kittens per litter, and a fertile cat can produce one to two litters a year on average. Of course, the actual number of kittens and litters will vary from cat to cat. Your vet will be able to determine the exact number using ultrasounds and x-rays.

Weight Gain and Appetite

Your cat will gain weight but she will not really begin to show until the last few weeks. That is also when her appetite will increase the most, and now is not the time for watching her weight (unless she was already overweight). Remember, she is not only eating for one anymore. She may be eating for several!

Cats have been known to get morning sickness and cravings, just like people, but if you find your cat eating dirt, or anything else that is not food, check with your vet. She may have a condition called **pica**, and may need supplements due to a nutritional imbalance or mineral deficiency.

Otherwise, feed your queen the same food she has always enjoyed, but start mixing protein into the meals. Later in the pregnancy, you may want to switch her to a kitten food that is formulated for growing cats. You can continue that diet while she is nursing and until she has weaned her kittens, supplementing it with a quality canned food or sardines. Because of the space being taken up inside, there will not be much room left for food, so your cat will need to eat smaller and more frequent meals. Make sure that there is always food available for when she is hungry and, most importantly, that there is always water available to her.

Cat pregnancy Timeline

Week 1 (0 - 7 days)

- Kittens - Between 20-24 hours after mating, the zygote, consisting of two cells is formed. 4 - 6 days after mating, the ball (known as a morulae) consists of approximately 30 cells. Around five days after copulation the morulae enters the uterine horn. By ten days, some blastocysts have hatched.
- Mother - There are no visible signs of pregnancy in your cat.

Week 2 (8 - 14 days)

- Kittens - Implantation occurs 12-13 days after ovulation.
- Mother - Palpitation of the uterus is possible as early as day 15, round 1cm swellings within the uterus may be felt by an experienced veterinarian.

Week 3 (15 - 21 days)

- Kittens - An ultrasound can be used to detect the pregnancy and the foetal heartbeat can be seen. By 21 days the unborn kittens are between 1.2 and 2.5 cm. The foetal heartbeat can be detected around 22 days.

- Mother - The queen's nipples will become pink and enlarged. This is known as 'pinking up'. Some cats will develop morning sickness by the third week of pregnancy.

Week 4 (22 - 28 days)

- Kittens - The embryo is now a foetus. The eyes and limbs are clearly forming, the toes on the forelimbs are starting to separate. Your veterinarian will be able to feel individual foetuses as discrete masses at this stage.
- Mother - By the fourth week of pregnancy, she should have gained enough weight to make her pregnancy visible.

Week 5 (29 - 35 days)

- Kittens - The foetus is now approximately 58mm long from crown to rump. The limbs continue to grow, the claws and paw pads are now obvious. It will be difficult to feel individual kittens by 35 days.
- Mother - You may notice some behavioural changes in your cat, she may become more affectionate as her pregnancy progresses.

Week 6 (36 - 42 days)

- Kittens - The bones of the foetuses have mineralised by 40-45 days and can be seen on an x-ray. The ear flaps, tail and genitalia are now obvious. The claws are well developed.
- Mother - The mother is obviously pregnant.

Week 7 (43 - 49 days)

- Kittens - The hair follicles are beginning to develop. The skin is becoming thicker and the hair follicles are beginning to sprout hair.
- Mother - By this stage the mother is quite large and becoming uncomfortable. You should be able to see and feel the kittens moving around at this stage.

Week 8 (50 - 56 days)

- Kittens - By 56 days, the crown rump length is 121 mm (4.76 inches). Pigmented hair now covers the body of the unborn kittens.
- Mother - The mother is still growing in size, she will be slowing down now due to discomfort. She may have toileting accidents.

Week 9 (57 - 63 days)

- Kitten - By 60 days the kitten is approximately 145 mm (5.7 inches) long from crown to rump.
- Mother - The queen may show signs of nesting, her behaviour may change. Some can become quite clingy with their family, others prefer to be alone. She may start to produce milk.

Late Pregnancy Accommodations

It is possible that your cat will not make it to her litter box on time due to the increased pressure on her bladder. Now is not the time to scold her. She may also need a little extra help cleaning her bottom, if her belly is not allowing her to reach it. A soft, moist cloth can be used if she will allow it.

In the final weeks of her pregnancy, your cat's nipples will swell and there may be some milk leakage.

How to know when your cat is starting to give birth

The mammary glands increase in size during the last week of gestation. Around two days before the queen gives birth she will start producing milk. She may start nesting. Drop in temperature to around 99 F. Her appetite may wane in the last day or two of pregnancy. During the last week or so your queen may become either reclusive and seek out a secluded place or she may become more affectionate, especially if she is particularly bonded to one carer.

First Stage Labour – Lasts up to 36 hours

Usually shorter in queens which have had kittens before. There are intermittent contractions, but NO straining is seen. The queen is restless and there are usually repeated visits to the bed late in the first stage, some scratching of the bedding and panting may be seen vaginal discharge is rare.

Second Stage Labour – Lasts 5 – 30minutes for each kitten

There are stronger contractions the foetal membranes – water bag – appear briefly at the vulva and burst. Liquid is usually cleared up by the cat active straining starts and the kitten usually comes out head first once the head is out, one or two strains from the cat should expel the kitten the mother breaks the bag and chews through the cord and licks the kitten – this cleans it and encourages it to start to breathe

Third Stage Labour – Lasts up to 36 hours

Passage of the membranes and dark flesh mass of the placenta or afterbirth, this usually follows immediately, although occasionally two kittens are born followed by two sets of membranes try to count the number of placentae to ensure one is passed for each kitten. If they are not all passed within four to six hours, veterinary advice should be sought. Bear in mind, the queen will usually eat the placenta to hide evidence of the birth and protect her offspring a red-brown vaginal discharge may be seen for up to three weeks after the birth. It is abnormal if it is green or foul smelling – although there may normally be a small amount of greenish discharge after the kitten or placenta. Time between delivery of kittens is usually 10 to 60 minutes and



stages two and three are repeated. The birth is usually complete within six hours after the start of the second stage, but can last up to 12 hours. Between one and nine kittens will be born in a litter – most commonly four to six. First-time queens usually have a small litter size. When the birth is finished the mother will settle and allow the kittens to feed.

Danger Signs

Seek veterinary attention immediately, on 01609 772036 if you notice the following signs:

If your queen stops eating for more than 24 hours

If she has an elevated temperature

If she becomes depressed or lethargic

If she has any unpleasant smelling discharge coming from the vagina

During labour:

If straining and uncomfortable with no progress over 30minutes

Intermittent straining over 2 hours with no kittens

Any foul smelling/green discharge

How to Help a Cat Give Birth

Just before she goes into labour, your queen will be wandering the house restlessly looking for a nesting space to birth in. You will want to keep your closets closed, but create a quiet corner with a paper lined box. She may or may not use it; let her choose the place she is most comfortable. Even if you do not approve of the spot she has chosen, do not try to move her. If your queen feels stressed or threatened at all, her labour can stop cold, possibly leading to a life-threatening situation for her or her kittens. Keep the house as calm and quiet as possible and do not get involved in the birthing process unless you are absolutely positive that something has gone wrong. Once the kittens have all arrived, and your queen is relaxed, the whole family can be moved to a clean and comfortable area that has been set aside for their bedding.

Congratulations, you are now the proud "parent" of several new kittens that will soon be scurrying around. Keep in mind that their immune systems and bones are very fragile; they should not be picked up by every cooing person that comes along -- not to mention the "queen mum" may become violently protective if anyone does try to do this too soon.