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## Feline Pregnancy and Kitting

Gestation length in the cat is usually between 63 and 67 days. The average litter size is 4-6 and first time queens usually have a smaller litter size.

Your cat will need to eat more towards the end of her pregnancy to satisfy the demands of growing kittens. In the last 3-4 weeks of pregnancy she will need approximately 25% more food. Feed kitten food in regular meals, this should continue through lactation until the kittens are weaned as queens use more than double their normal energy requirement when suckling.

Fresh water should always be available. You do not need to 'give milk to make milk'.

Pregnant queens should be introduced to a quiet, clean and warm kitting area away from the family and other pets at least two weeks before the expected date for birth.

Signs of impending Kitting:

- She may become anxious and search out a quiet place to give birth.
- She may stop eating 12-24hrs before giving birth and she may vomit. Some cats continue eating right up until kitting.
- Her mammary glands may enlarge and start to produce milk.



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## First Stage Labour:

- May last from 6-36hours.
- Vaginal relaxation and intermittent uterine contractions with no abdominal straining.
- The Queen may appear uncomfortable, shifting position and looking at her stomach.
- She may vocalise, turn around in circles and wash repeatedly.

## Second Stage Labour

- Usually lasts 3-12 hours.
- The first foetus starts to move into the pelvis and intense uterine contractions occur with abdominal straining.
- At this stage, before kittens are seen, the first foetal sac or 'waters' may break resulting in leaking of clear fluid.
- The first kitten is usually delivered within one hour of the start of the second stage labour. The kitten may be delivered in a sac which the queen will break and then lick the kitten to simulate it and break the umbilical cord. If the queen does not remove the membrane from the newborn kitten you should remove it from around its mouth to enable it to breathe. It may help to start the kitten breathing if you



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squeeze fluid from its nose and mouth by gentle massage towards the nose. Rubbing the kitten gently with a towel may also help but it is better to encourage the queen to do both of these things herself if at all possible.

### Third Stage Labour:

- The passing of the placenta(s). This may occur about 15 minutes after the delivery of each kitten or after a group of kittens are born. The Queen may eat the placentas.
- After kittening the Queen may have a red-brown discharge which decreases over 2-3 weeks. This is the remaining foetal and placental fluid and is normal.

### When to contact the Vet:

- If the queen has a red/brown discharge but no kitten is born in 2-4 hours.
- If foetal fluid was passed 2-3 hours ago but nothing else has happened.
- If the Queen has had weak irregular straining for more than 2-4 hours.
- If the Queen has had vigorous abdominal straining for 20-30 minutes but no kitten has been born.



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- If more than 2 hours have passed since birth the last kitten and you think that there are more to come.
- If the Queen has been in second stage labour for more than 12 hours.
- If the post delivery discharge is very bloody or foul smelling.
- If the general demeanour of the queen or kittens is abnormal.
- If you are worried about anything.

Difficult births require veterinary intervention and/or caesarean section are uncommon in the cat but if you are worried please call.

After kittening:

- Warmth is very important as newborn kittens lose heat very quickly. An attentive queen will clean the kittens and warm them with her body heat. If she is too tired or if she is disturbed she may not do this in which case a covered hot water bottle (no hotter than body temperature) may be used.
- Check that the Queen has milk by gently squeezing her nipples. The kittens will cry if they are hungry. Try and encourage them to feed by holding them on the nipples if they don't seem to be getting the hang of it. It is important that they get the first milk or colostrum as this contains antibodies to protect them against



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infection. Newborn kittens cannot go more than a few hours without milk.

- Check the Queen daily to ensure that her mammary glands haven't become inflamed, reddened or painful. This could be mastitis, an infection of the mammary gland and requires veterinary attention. Hot compresses and gentle massage towards the nipples may help to simulate milk flow if mastitis has been diagnosed. Do not stop the kittens feeding from the queen with mastitis as this will make things much worse and any bacteria in the milk will be destroyed by the acid in the kittens' stomachs.

- Healthy newborns are mobile and crawl around. They sleep a lot and feed frequently. At birth their eyes are closed and will open when they are 10-14 days old. They will begin to walk at about 3 weeks of age.

- Kittens can be treated for fleas from 2 days of age with frontline spray, and should be wormed regularly from 2-3 weeks of age with a veterinary licensed product.

- Weaning occurs from 4-6 weeks of age and small amounts of kitten food in shallow bowl or saucer should be gradually introduced.

- Queens can be spayed as soon as the kittens are fully weaned.

- Kittens can be vaccinated from 9 weeks old.



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Updated May 2017