

Care of the Pregnant Cat

Average of 65 days of pregnancy, allow 4 days either way

Feeding

Increase from week 6 of pregnancy up to double usual amount by the time of giving birth. The best foods to offer are growth foods, especially for pregnant cats, we recommend 'Hills Feline Growth'. Offer the food free range throughout the day in lots of small meals, replacing as necessary.

After birth the queen will need further increased feeding.

As a general rule:-

- Week one – twice her usual allowance of food
- Week two until kittens weaned – three times her usual allowance of food.

Worming and Flea Treatment

Regular worming is advised of mum. It is possible to worm her in pregnancy but speak to us about what products can safely be used. Ensure mum and your house are flea free before the kittens come along. The best treatment for the house is a spray. We have insecticidal or insecticide free and we can explain which is best for you. To treat mum please speak to our veterinary team for the current safe recommendations.

Do's and Don'ts during pregnancy...

Don't keep mum indoors and confined if she is used to going out; this will only cause her stress. Most cats are sensible and won't give birth outside and miles away from home!

Do provide a few well-blanketed card board boxes around the house for her to kitten in; quiet, draft free rooms are best where there is not constant traffic. Be prepared that she may prefer to settle down on your bed if she already sees it as a safe, secure environment.

Don't interfere with the birth unless mum or kittens seem to be in distress. Mum will be uncomfortable but shouldn't be in immense pain whilst giving birth.

The basics of giving birth...

Mum may go off her food about 24 hours before giving birth. Restlessness and occasional abdominal contractions are the first signs of imminent kittening. This can last for 12-24 hours. Next will come increased contractions and straining, there shouldn't be more than 1-2 hours between each kitten being born.

Mum should lick and bite/rip off the umbilical cord. If she fails to bite off the cord and it remains attached to the kitten and placenta then you can gently clamp and cut off the cord about two inches from the kittens tummy, taking care not to pull; there may be a little bleeding from the severed cord but this shouldn't be excessive.

Watch out for dark, smelly discharge without any kittens being produced for any length of time. It is normal for mum to have diarrhoea for several days after kittening; this is a result of eating the afterbirth – yum!

Keep an eye on mum's teats; any hard, lumpy swellings or kittens that don't seem to be getting fed could indicate 'mastitis' – inflammation of the mammary glands. Speak to your vet if you suspect this – it is vital that treatment is given without delay to benefit both mum and kittens.

After birth it may be worth keeping mum indoors with the run of the house for several days to avoid her disappearing and leaving you holding (and feeding!) the kittens.

Care of the kittens

Mum should feed the kittens for the first 3-4 weeks, after which time you can start weaning them onto kitten food. Hills kitten food or another leading brand is recommended. If using dry food then soak; if using tinned food ensure that it is suitably mashed up to ensure the kittens are able to eat it, Initially feed every 2-4 hours throughout the day and by the time of weaning up until about 3 months of age offer food about four times daily, twice daily should be sufficient after this.

Use tepid post-boiled water to mix the food with and you may have to finger feed the kittens initially. NEVER OFFER COWS MILK – this can cause vomiting and diarrhoea. Offer fresh water as well as food – all in shallow dishes. Depending on how quickly the kittens grow, they can stay on a 'growth' diet until between 9-12 months of age.

Worming

From 8 weeks of age, worm monthly until 6 months of age. Thereafter every 3 months for life as a minimum! We use products that are extremely effective.

Flea treatment

Start treating with Frontline spray anytime from 2 days old – read instructions carefully and be careful not to soak the kittens. It is advisable to use the spray first which lasts for 2 months and then go to a prescription spot on treatment from 8 weeks of age. It is vital to ensure your kittens do not have fleas. As with any other animal, fleas can cause anaemia, in kittens this can take affect very quickly and is a common cause of fatalities. If you would like us to administer this treatment for you, please book an appointment with one of our nursing staff.

Vaccination

Vaccinate at 9 and 12 weeks of age. Although the kittens can, in theory, go out 1 week after the second vaccination, it is advisable to keep them indoors until neutering at 6 months of age, to prevent against unwanted pregnancies.

Sexing

Don't believe the myth that all ginger cats are male and all tortoiseshell cats are female!

Lift up the tail and you should see 2 holes – anus and penis or anus and vulva, the females have a smaller distance between the two and the males may (even from a very young age) have a pair of testicles between the holes.

Other useful information...

Mum can be spayed from about 4-6 weeks after giving birth, as soon as her milk has dried up and the kittens are being weaned. Unless you are worried about any of the kittens or mum then you don't need to get them checked by a vet after birth; this can cause unnecessary stress to both mum and kittens.

Sadly, in your average litter of kittens it is not unusual for one or two to die within the first few weeks of life for unknown reasons but if the entire litter seems ill or listless then please get bring them in for an examination as soon as possible.

Above all, good luck and feel free to call us if you need advice!