Pregnant Cats

If we have placed a pregnant cat with you, we will give you as much information as we can on the anticipated birth date of the litter, but it is very difficult to determine, so at best it is a guess.

Signs of Labour:

- Excessive neediness, wanting to be massaged
- Restlessness
- Pulling things from drawers etc. to make bed: nesting
- Leaking nipples
- Vaginal discharge, any colour
- Compulsive cleaning of vaginal area
- Either large appetite or none at all

The birthing process may go on for many hours, so set yourself up to be comfortable if you plan to share this experience with the mom. The first and sometimes the second kittens often come quickly, with a substantial wait after that. As each cat is a little different, please respect her “wishes” regarding company at this time. Do not allow the whole family in the room if mom appears anxious and tries to hide from the crowd. Usually she is happy with one person to provide comfort and massage. Do not have any other animals in the room. Some cats, especially first-time moms, panic a bit after the first births and will sometimes try to run.

During the birth

Encourage her to use her “momma bed” box. This low-front box will keep the kittens corralled but enable the mom to move in and out easily.
Be sure the litter box is very near the nest as she will be reluctant to travel far from her babies at this time.
Offer mom mushy food and water as she is lying in the nest (mix clear Pedialyte or warm water in with food, or syringe into her mouth straight).

Encourage her to stay put with the new kittens.

Placenta and umbilical cord & placenta should follow each kitten. The mom will digest these. If she leaves one, you can dispose of it.

As each kitten is born, keep note that the placenta is delivered each time as a retained placenta can cause serious infection.

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If in the days following the birth mom loses her appetite, shows signs of fever or you feel her breast tissue (not nipples) is hardened or very warm, call your foster coordinator or assigned emergency contact immediately.

Never pull the kitten or the placenta as it is coming out. The mother will bite the cord about an inch from the kitten's belly. The only time we cut the cord is if mom is anxious and the cord is tight with little clearance between the kitten and the birth canal.

If you can't calm down the mom while waiting for the placenta to come out, you may pinch the cord hard with your forefinger and thumbnail about an inch from the kitten (this is the important end), and then again another inch further. Cut carefully in between the pinched areas. Immediately check that the cut cord on the kitten side is not bleeding. If so, pinch it until bleeding stops.

Helping the kittens breathe

If the sac is off the kitten's head, give the kitten to mom headfirst and have her clean it. It is very important that the nose is the first area to be cleaned, so the kitten can breathe. Sometimes, mothers need to stand up and move around to deliver the next kitten. Pull the delivered kittens into your lap and keep a warm towel standing by to keep them warm and covered while mom is trudging around. Generally the mother cat keeps things pretty clean, but you may need to remove a layer of the bedding if it gets particularly soiled. We like to have a large bath towel inside two pillowcases open at opposite ends as the main bed. Layer a number of towels on top of that and as they are soiled, pull them out from under mom and kittens. Once they are all born, a pillowcase covered towel is the best bed as kittens have very sharp nails that get caught up in toweling.

Things that can go wrong

Mom not cleaning the kitten and removing the sac

Clear it away from the kitten's mouth and nose. Run your finger gently through the mouth to ensure it is clear. Place the kitten directly under the mother's mouth. If she does nothing and the kitten appears to be struggling, cut the cord (see above instructions), clear the mouth and nose again, briskly rub the kitten's body up and down.

Kitten not breathing

Wrap the kitten in a small cloth, hold it securely in your hands face up with your fingers locked securely behind its head and your thumbs crossed over its chest.

Raise kitten high over your head, its head up and “whoosh” it with a swinging motion toward the floor, straight down, ensuring there is no furniture or impediment in the way. This is to help clear the airway and stimulate breathing. Do this a couple of times and then rub the kitten’s chest and back and check that it is breathing. If not you may next try blowing wee puffs of air into the kitten’s nose and mouth, simultaneously for 3 breaths and then tiny pumps on its chest for five compressions, then check again. Try this a few times.

If you are not able to revive the kitten, please do not blame yourself. It is likely an internal problem with the kitten and it wouldn’t have survived anyway. WE CANNOT SAVE THEM ALL.

If the mother is not paying any attention to the kitten, quietly remove it from her line of sight. If she has seen it, wait until she is distracted before taking it away.

Kittens not nursing

Particularly in long-haired cats, you may want to clean away some of the fur from the nipple area to make feeding easier.

Check kitten for cleft palate – a common birth defect that will affect the kitty’s ability to ear.

Please feel free to call those of us on your contact list if you are feeling anxious or overwhelmed. We are here to help. Sadly, about 20% of kittens die when very young, so while it is a tragic event, it is not uncommon.

Bottle Feeding

Occasionally, even kittens with moms need the supplement of a bottle. In the event that we are bringing you orphaned kittens, we will go over the feeding procedures with you on site. The best way to raise a litter of orphaned kittens is to keep them in a small, enclosed space (shut bathroom or large kennel) for the first weeks.

What you need:

- Kitten Milk Replacer (KMR)
- Nursing Bottles & Nipples
- Soft towels
- Coarse wash rag
- Paper Towels
- Kitchen Scale
- Corn Syrup (for emergencies)

Instructions:
Prepare your supplies. Sterilize the kitten-sized baby bottles and nipples in a boiling water bath for about 5 minutes. Cool before using. Place a large towel, a rough-textured washcloth and a bowl of warm water on a table next to a comfortable chair. TIP: Buy several bottles and nipples, then sterilize and fill a number of them at once, and refrigerate. Warm as needed, following the directions above.

Fill bottle with desired amount of commercial kitten milk replacement such as KMR. Warm the formula by placing the bottle in a bowl of very hot water, then test it against your forearm. Never microwave the formula. It should be 95° to 100° F, or approximately body temperature. Test the nipple to ensure the flow is just right (one drop at a time).

Sit in the chair with the towel folded in your lap. Place the kitten prone (face down) on your lap. Never bottle-feed a kitten on its back like a human baby. Hold with one hand under the belly with the head between your thumb and forefinger to steady the head. Think of the kitten's position when it is feeding from a mother cat and try to copy this as closely as possible. It also helps to have them wrapped in a small, soft cloth ("a kitten burrito") to prevent distraction and wriggling, and minimize mess.

If the kitten does not start nursing right away, or if he seems to have trouble getting the milk, check the nipple again. It should not drip milk when held upside down, but should drip given a small amount of pressure. Ensure the hole in the nipple is of sufficient size (snip off a sliver only large enough to allow a drop of formula to come out when bottle is turned upside down). Then, squeeze the bottle away from the kitten's mouth just to get a drop onto the end of the nipple to encourage feeding. It may also be helpful to stroke his head or gently pet his back to start his nursing reflexes, but once he gets the idea, he will nurse readily. Never squeeze the milk into the kitten's mouth. If too much milk is going into the kitten's tiny mouth too quickly, aspiration can occur, causing death.

Much like human babies, kittens may need "burping" after nursing. This is best accomplished by holding one hand under his abdomen and gently patting his upper back. Not too hard - you don't want him to vomit. If he doesn't burp right away

The mother cat will stimulate her kitten's elimination by licking his anus and genital area with her rough tongue. You can emulate this process with a warm, damp, rough washcloth or dampened paper towel. It may take a couple of feedings to see results, so don't despair if he doesn't defecate right away. Urinating may take a bit longer. Your kitten will want to sleep after nursing, so put him back into his bed to let him sleep undisturbed.

Your newborn kitten will need approximately 32 cc (1.1 oz.) of formula a day, divided into 9 - 12 feedings a day, depending on his size and condition. Count on feeding him

every two hours or so, around the clock, for starters. Yes, it's a demanding job, but intensely rewarding to watch your newborn develop and grow. Never allow anyone to feed the kittens, especially children, without proper training. Feeding Schedule It’s a good idea to weigh the kittens every day and record their weights. They should be steadily increasing. If not, call your foster coordinator. When the kittens are…. 0-7 days old Mix one measure of dry KMR to two measures of Pedialyte.

They are fed every 2 hours around the clock for the first week and a half. This can be stretched out a little at night. Use the Pedialyte clear for half of the wet mix when making formula. If your kittens develop diarrhea, keep the bum rinsed with warm water and use a zinc cream to sooth it. Contact your foster coordinator or your assigned emergency contact ASAP.

1 – 3 weeks old
Every 2 – 3 hours, with the longer interval as they grow a little older 4 weeks old You can start to encourage them to eat and drink on their own at 4 weeks of age. Put a little bit of the food on your finger and let the kitten sniff the food. You can put the food right in their mouth. Don’t worry if they don’t seem interested at first, keep trying every time it is feeding time and they will eventually eat. the formula. Just go gradually and see how they react.

WARNING: When kittens first start to eat on their own, they can become hypoglycemic very easily. THIS COMES ON VERY QUICKLY AND CAN RESULT IN DEATH. Kittens with dehydration show lack of energy and no interest in eating. Dehydration can be tested by pulling the skin on the back of neck up; if it goes down very slowly, there is dehydration. Keep a bottle of corn syrup handy. If you find a kitten flat or very sluggish, put a drop or two of corn syrup in its mouth right away. Follow with some water and contact your assigned emergency contact immediately. Hypoglycemia can be avoided by closely monitoring the kittens when first eating, to ensure that each one is getting a good amount of food at each meal. Even if being fed by mom cats this can happen (cats can suddenly run out of milk or have their milk go bad).

5 – 6 weeks

Start to offer a bit of canned food on your finger. Some kittens catch on very quickly and dive in. Some stick to the bottle for a while longer. Just try it each day until they get the idea.

7 weeks

By now they should not be using a bottle, but eating gloppy mix off a plate. They should have a meal 4 to 5 times a day.

8 weeks

You can bring down the number of feeds at this point, as their stomachs can hold more. Likely 3 to 4 meals a day

Elimination

After every feeding it is vital that the kitten is helped to eliminate. The mother does this by stimulating the genitals and anus through gentle licking.. Instead, have a bowl of warm water and tissues handy. After the kitten feeds, dip the tissue in the water and very gently massage repeatedly from the stomach to the tail. Urine is easily produced but it sometimes takes a bit more effort to encourage a bowel movement and it may not occur with every feeding. If the stomach is tight or bloated or you just think the kitten is having a difficult time having a movement, contact your foster coordinator. The kitten should have at least one good bowel movement a day, so you may want to keep a chart if you have difficulty keeping track. Once the kittens are moving around, they will naturally climb out of the nest to eliminate. When this begins, divide the containment area to bedding on one end and one of our low litter boxes with paper towels or pee pads softened with a bit of water at the other. You may need to continue to aid their elimination until you are confident they are consistently doing it on their own.

Keeping kittens warm

After kittens are fed, burped and relieved, all they need is sleep. Return them to their nest and cover them with a blanket or towel to keep their bed warm and dark.We will provide a heating pad.

Kitten milestones at a glance

- Birth to week 1 – Kittens are born with eyes closed and ears folded. They weigh between 90-100 grams. The umbilical cord stump falls off around day three. By the end of the first week, the kitten has doubled his weight.
- Week 2 – Eyes begin to open. First baby teeth erupt.
- Week 3 – Ears are now erect. Some kittens begin exploring.
- Week 4 – Canine teeth (fangs) have erupted. Hearing is well developed.
- Week 5 – Eyesight is now fully developed. Kittens begin to try solid food.
- Weeks 6 to 8 – Eye colour begins to change. Kittens are now extremely active. They should receive their first vaccination at 8 weeks.

Grow

- Eyes and ears – Kittens are born blind and deaf. Their eyes are closed and their ears folded down.
- Teeth – Kittens are born without teeth.
- Weight – Newborn kittens weigh between 90-100 grams (3 ounces) by the end of the first week they should have doubled their weight to 200 grams (6 ounces).
- Newborn kittens are unable to regulate their body temperatures and rely on mum to keep warm. The kitten's environment must be kept at a constant temperature to avoid hypothermia or hyperthermia.
- The umbilical cord remains attached for the first three days.
- The mother stimulates her kittens to go to the toilet. After her kittens have fed, she will lick their bellies and genital areas, eating any feces and urine.
- At birth, they usually weigh around 100g.

Development:

- In the first week of life, kittens do little more than sleep and eat. When they are awake, they stay close to the mother. The mother stimulates urination and defecation in her kittens by licking them.

While it is important to keep an eye on the mother and her kittens, too much interference may result in the mother cat moving her kittens to another location.

Week 2

Image Helen Haden, Flickr

Grow

- Eyes – By the second week, their eyes are beginning to open (although their vision is not very good at this stage). Do not force their eyes open, as it could result in damage. Young kittens are vulnerable to eye infections, so keep a watch for any signs of infection, such as crustiness or white/yellow secretions. All kittens have blue eyes at this stage. The kitten's pupils don't dilate and contract efficiently, so avoid bright light.
- Teeth – The baby (deciduous) incisors erupt. These are the small teeth at the front of the mouth.
- Ears – The ears are still folded at this age.
- Weight gain is around seven to ten grams a day. By the end of the second week, they should weigh approximately 300 grams (10.5 ounces).
- The sense of smell is developing. They will often have a preference for a particular nipple.

Parasites

- Worm kittens – First dose.

Week 3

Image WJ van den Eijkhof, Flickr

Grow

- Ears – By three weeks, their ears will be erect and their sense of hearing is developing.
- It is around the three-week mark that kittens begin to shakily move about.
- The sense of smell is well developed.
- The kittens may defecate on their own at this stage, the mother will still clean up their waste.

Milestones

- Some kittens will try to walk and explore.
- By three weeks, the kitten is becoming more aware of his littermates.
- Some kittens may begin to purr.

Week 4

Image Fuzzy Gerdes, Flickr

Growth

- Teeth – The deciduous canine (fangs) teeth have erupted.
- The sense of smell is fully mature.
- Weight – The kitten should now weigh approximately 500 grams (18 ounces).
- Their eyesight is improving, although it will be a few more weeks before it is fully developed. The sense of hearing is now well developed.

Milestones

- The kittens are becoming more and more active and are interacting with their littermates. They may attempt to explore outside the confines of their kittening box.
- The mother is still grooming her offspring, but they are also able to groom themselves.
- It is at this time that the mother will begin to leave her kittens for short periods of time.
- At this stage, you can provide a small bowl of water for kittens to drink from.

Parasites

- Worm kittens – second dose.

Week 5

Image WJ van den Eijkhof, Flickr

Growth

- Eyes – The sight is fully developed.

Milestones

- The weaning process can begin around five weeks of age. Start out slowly by mixing canned or dry cat food in with some kitten formula to make baby food (check the ingredients to make sure the food contains no onion, as this is toxic to cats). Not all kittens will take to food immediately, so patience is important.

Introduce a small amount, initially. You can introduce solids either by placing a small amount of food on your finger or in a cat bowl. Kittens should be provided with a shallow bowl to eat from.

- Although they may have begun to wean, kittens are still regularly nursing from their mother.
- Kittens are much more graceful on their feet at this stage and are exploring a lot more, often stalking and pouncing on their littermates.
- They may start to use the litter tray, although you will likely still find some accidents. Make sure that the bedding is easily washable, so you can ensure the area remains clean. Provide them with a small litter tray, and make sure it has litter which is safe for young kittens to use (and possibly eat).