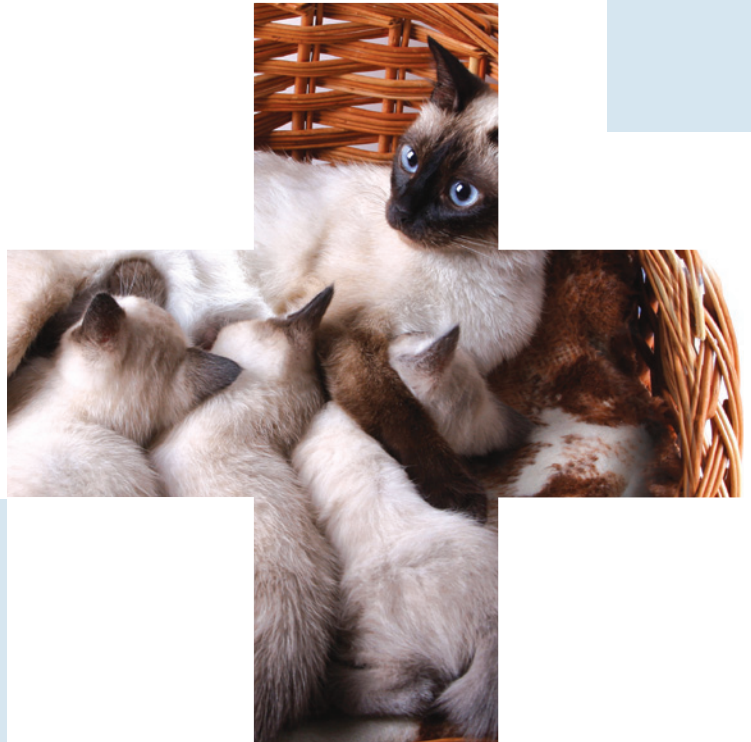


General Practice Service
Willows Information Sheets

Looking after your pregnant cat





Looking after your pregnant cat

The following information is aimed at ordinary cat owners rather than cat breeders. It is only a summary and we recommend researching the subject more thoroughly so that you are well prepared for all eventualities. The [Feline Advisory Bureau](#) is a good place to start and we are more than happy to discuss any aspect of your cat's pregnancy with you in more detail.

Should your cat have kittens?

Although kittens are extremely appealing, there are some important issues to consider before allowing your cat to have kittens:

- Unfortunately, there are already thousands of unwanted cats and kittens needing homes in rescue centres in the UK. You must be sure that you can guarantee good homes for your litter of kittens.
- It is important to consider the safety of your cat. Very young or old cats or cats in poor condition have an increased risk of complications during pregnancy and labour and may have difficulty rearing their kittens.
- It is essential to consider the commitment required in terms of both time and finances. In the majority of cases, all goes well, but an emergency trip to the vet in the middle of the night for a caesarean section is not unheard of. It may even become necessary to hand rear the kittens which can involve feeding them up to 10 times within a 24 hour period.

We recommend routine spaying of cats at 4 to 6 months of age. If your cat is in early or mid-term pregnancy, then it is still possible to have her spayed.

Feeding your pregnant cat

Good balanced nutrition is vital, both during pregnancy while the kittens are developing in the womb and during lactation when your cat maybe producing milk for multiple hungry kittens. A standard adult cat food won't provide all the extra nutrients required, and in fact it is best to switch her to a commercially produced kitten food.

The kitten food should be introduced from about week 4 of pregnancy as the developing foetuses start to place extra demands on the mother-to-be. To avoid any tummy upsets, the change of diet should be done gradually over a period of 5 days. Try to use the brand of cat food that your cat is used to and feed a wet or dry diet according to what she usually prefers.

The amount that you feed your cat should be based on the manufacturer's guidelines found on the food packaging and can be adjusted according to your cat's body condition. Feed several small meals throughout the day and ensure that there is always plenty of fresh water available.

The kitten food should be continued throughout lactation and gradually reduced as the kittens start to wean at around 4 weeks of age.

If a good quality commercial kitten food is fed during pregnancy and lactation, there is no need to supplement extra vitamins or minerals. In fact, giving additional calcium during pregnancy can lead to problems with low blood calcium during lactation.

Vaccination

Mothers provide protective immunity to their kittens via their colostrum (the milk produced in the first few hours after birth). To ensure that your cat has sufficient antibodies to pass on to her kittens, it is important that she is up to date with her routine vaccinations prior to mating. If, by the time your cat is pregnant, she has not been vaccinated or her vaccinations have lapsed, then careful consideration must be given to the type and timing of vaccination to be used, as only certain vaccines can be given safely during pregnancy.

The kittens should be vaccinated at 9 and 12 weeks of age then annually.

Worming

Roundworms are transmitted from the mother to her kittens via the milk during suckling, therefore it is important to worm your cat to prevent infection of the kittens. Ideally, cats should be wormed prior to mating, as only certain wormers can be used safely during pregnancy. Where this has not been possible, it is essential to check with us which wormer to use.

The kittens should be wormed at 2, 5, 8 and 12 weeks of age then monthly until they are 6 months old. The mother should be wormed at the same time as the kittens until they are weaned.

Flea Control

Flea control is important during pregnancy as fleas can lead to severe, sometimes fatal anaemia in kittens. Please check with us which flea products are safe to use during pregnancy and safe to apply to kittens.

Preparation

During the final week or so of pregnancy, cats start to search for a nesting area and, ideally, they should be confined indoors at this point. Providing a suitable nesting box, such as a cardboard box, in the last 2 weeks of pregnancy allows time for your cat to become familiar with it. The box should be large enough to allow her to stand up, turn around and lie out flat to feed her kittens. To allow access, cut one side away leaving a high enough lip to prevent kittens from falling out of the box or exploring too soon. Cover the top with a towel to provide privacy and use newspaper and towels as bedding. The box should be placed in an area with minimal human traffic and separated from other pets in the home. It is likely your cat will chose a different location for nesting and the box can be moved to this position but don't be surprised if she chooses to have her kittens under or on your bed or in the airing cupboard!

Labour / Kitting

Thankfully, problems during labour are uncommon in the average, healthy "moggy", although difficulties may occur more frequently in pure bred cats such as Siamese or Persians. Pregnancy generally lasts for 63 to 65 days (approximately 9 weeks). An average litter size is 4 kittens but litter sizes can vary from 1 to 12 kittens, and first litters are usually smaller.

Whilst it is important to supervise the birth from a distance, it is equally important to leave your cat in peace and quiet and as undisturbed as possible. Most cats deal with the whole process on their own without any problems and require no intervention. Once labour has started, it is essential to leave your cat in her chosen place. Moving her may stress her into curtailing her labour or may scare her into neglecting her litter.

Several hours (and perhaps a whole day) of restlessness, grooming, nesting, pacing, panting and crying indicates that labour has begun. The first stage of labour progresses to the second stage of labour with the initiation of hard contractions with straining and the birth of a kitten. The third stage of labour refers to the passing of the placenta.

The entire litter is usually born within 6 hours with kittens arriving every 10 to 60 minutes. The new mother usually breaks the membranes, licks the kitten intensively and breaks the umbilical cord before eating the placenta and membranes of the kitten's sac.

Strong contractions for more than 20-30 minutes without production of a kitten indicate that your cat needs help and you should contact us. It is better to call for advice sooner rather than later.

Post-kittening complications

Complications can sometimes occur after kittening. These include problems such as the retention of foetal membranes, metritis (inflammation / infection of the womb) and mastitis (inflammation / infection of the mammary glands). If your cat is unwilling to settle with her kittens or ignores them, is dull and lethargic, refuses food, seems to have abdominal pain, stops drinking or drinks more, or has a persistent or smelly vaginal discharge, then she should be seen by the vet.

Lactation tetany or eclampsia is caused by low blood calcium levels due to the huge demand of milk production. Signs include agitation and restlessness, inco-ordination, muscle spasm, collapse and fitting – if you see these signs your cat needs to be seen urgently by the vet.

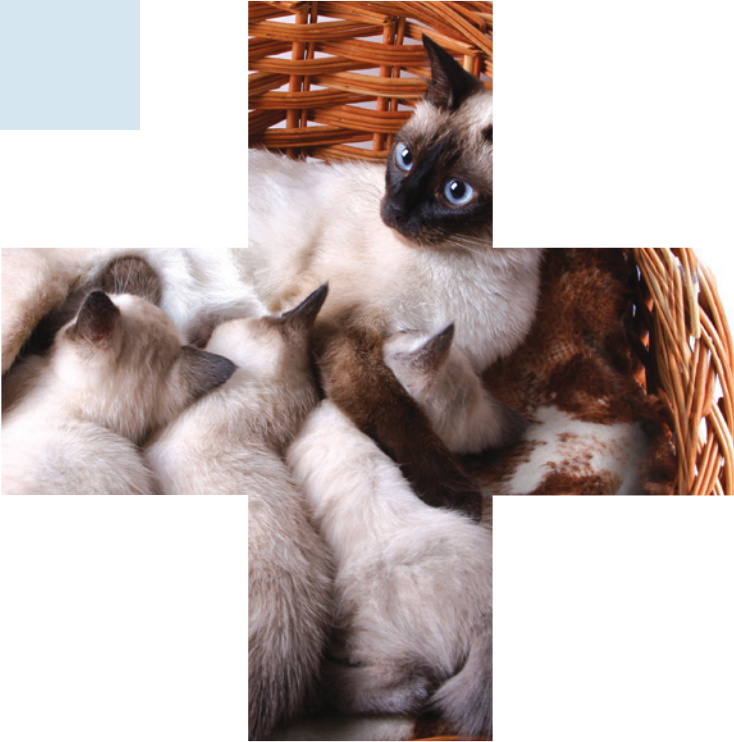
Further information is available from:

Feline Advisory Bureau

www.fabcats.org

If you have any queries or concerns regarding your pregnant or nursing bitch, please do not hesitate to [contact us](#).

General Practice Service
www.willows.uk.net



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