

## **Caring for Your Pregnant Queen**

### **Pregnancy**

It is important to record the date of mating so that the due date for cat to queen can be calculated. On average the length of a cat's pregnancy is 63 days. If your cat to go into labour on or before day 58, the kittens will be too weak to survive. If it has been more than 66 days, contact your vet as something may be wrong.

Signs of pregnancy include:

- A 40% increase in weight during the last half of the pregnancy
- Teats will become enlarge at 28 days
- Mammary glands may start to develop at 35 days and milk may be produced 1-2 weeks before whelping
- There may be a mucous discharge from the vulva after 32 days

It is possible to confirm a pregnancy by palpating the kittens between 26-35 days of pregnancy, unless the queen is overweight, nervous or heavily muscled. At 3 weeks before she is due to queen, her teats will become more prominent, firm and pink ('pinking up' is the term used to describe this).

Ultrasounding your queen to confirm pregnancy is possible from about day 28. After 45 days, pregnancy can be confirmed using x-rays (this will give you the most accurate result regarding the number of kittens present, however it is not always possible to exactly detect all kittens present).

### **Diet**

A pregnant or lactating queen needs a nutritionally balanced and complete diet. At 5 weeks of pregnancy your queen's feed intake should increase by 10% a week. She can be having feed on offer all the time.

After giving birth, she should be given as much as she wants to eat. It is sometimes recommended that a lactating queen may be fed a kitten or growth diet as they tend to be higher in energy and calcium.

### **Worming**

The queen should be wormed regularly throughout the pregnancy and lactation as roundworms are passed from the mother to the kitten through the placenta, through the milk and through the mother's faeces.

### **Queening**

The most reliable sign of impending labour within 24 hrs is a drop in core body temperature by 1°C. Milk may not be produced until labour has begun.

Queening begins with the onset of uterine contractions. The queen will make a nest, is restless, panting, vocalize and purr as delivery approaches. Her vulva is swollen, softened and has a clear mucous discharge. All of the signs mentioned above become more vigorous and continuous throughout the first stage. This stage on average lasts between 6-12 hrs, however as long as 24 hrs can be normal, without any obvious contraction efforts.

Delivery times will vary. Shorthaired cats and cats having slim heads, such as Siamese, may complete delivery in one to two hours. Domestic body type cats (having large, round heads) generally require longer delivery times. Persian and other domestic body type kittens tend to be very large and have sizable heads that make delivery more difficult. It is not unusual for Persians to rest an hour or more between each kitten.

It is not uncommon for some cats to rest after having 1 or 2 kittens for a period of up to 24hrs, before recommencing labour. However, if labour does not resume within a few hours after the delivery of the first kittens, examination by your vet is advisable

Kittens are usually born head first; however, 40% of kittens are delivered tail-end first. The placenta of each kitten usually passes after the kitten is born.

It is normal for the queen to eat the placentas.

### **When to call the vet**

If queening is proceeding normally, the queen should be left alone until all kittens have been delivered and have suckled.

Call the vet if:

- It has been more than 2 hours since the onset of straining and no kittens have been produced
- There is a greenish-black discharge preceding the birth of the kittens
- It has been more than 2 hours between kittens, and the queen is still straining
- The 'water bag' bursts and is not followed by a kitten within 1-2 hours
- The kitten is hanging out and the queen can't deliver it within 15 minutes
- A kitten has not suckled within 3 hours of birth

### **Aftercare**

Close observation of the queen and the kittens is important during the first weeks to make sure all are well and the kittens have enough milk. Kittens should be handled as little as possible during the first 2 weeks of life. The kittens should gain 10% of their body weight each day.

### **Mastitis (Infection of the mammary gland)**

Monitor the lactating queen's teats for signs of inflammation and infection. If they appear painful, red, hard, swollen or have an unusual discharge, contact your vet for a consultation.

### **Weaning and feeding kittens**

The transition to solid food can begin at about 4 weeks of age for kittens. A gruel (quality tinned kitten food diluted 2 parts to 1 part water) can be offered in a wide, shallow, rimmed bowl. You can slowly decrease the water dilution until the kittens are fully weaned at 6-8 weeks of age.

Fresh water should always be on offer.

As kittens seldom overeat, a completely balanced kitten diet can be offered *ad lib*.

### **Kitten health and care**

The kittens ideally should be wormed every two weeks from two weeks of age until 12 weeks of age, then monthly until 6 months of age.

The kittens should be vet checked and vaccinated between 6-8 weeks of age. At this time the kittens can be microchipped (sooner if needed).

