

Cat Labour – A Guide To Your Cat Giving Birth

Overview

- If you have a pregnant cat, it's important to be well informed and prepared for her kitting to reduce the chance of problems.
- **Immediately call your vet for advice if your cat is having trouble giving birth - timing can be the difference between life and death.**
- PDSA vets recommend neutering your cat before their first season to reduce the chance of an unwanted pregnancy.

Pregnancy, giving birth and newborn care



This article contains information about kitting. For more information on pregnancy, newborn kitten care and hand rearing, please read the articles listed below:

- [Pregnancy in Cats](#)
- [A Complete Guide to Newborn Kitten Care](#)
- [Hand rearing Kittens](#)

Preparing for kitting

The more prepared and informed you are for your cat's labour, the less likely problems are to develop.

Due date

Make a note of your cat's mating date (if you know it), so you know when to expect the kittens. Pregnancy in cats usually lasts between 63-68 days.

Kitting box



Prepare a basket or box for your cat to have her kittens in and set it up in advance so she becomes familiar with it. You can buy a disposable, self-assembly box or make one yourself; a large cardboard box will do. The box needs to be:

- In a quiet, secluded room that's kept at around 22°C
- Comfortable, warm and big enough for your cat to comfortably stand up in, fully stretch out and turn around in (open top is fine)
- Lined with an absorbent bedding material (i.e. towels/bedding)
- High enough to contain crawling, newborn kittens

Vet Help

Have your vet's daytime and out-of-hours telephone numbers handy in case you need any help or advice.

Feeding, worming and general care

Make sure your cat is well fed and regularly dewormed during her pregnancy. To find out more about caring for a pregnant cat, read our article 'Pregnancy in Cats'.

Normal kittinging

Preparation for birth

As your cat's body prepares to give birth, her birth canal relaxes and widens, while her kittens turn around into the correct position for birth. During this stage of kittinging, which often lasts between 6-12 hours, you might notice your cat's behaviour changing.

Signs often include:

- Becoming restless and vocal
- Hiding away
- Grooming excessively (especially around her vulva)
- Panting
- Eating less
- Passing a small amount of red/brown mucus from her vulva
- 'Nesting' - scratching and pacing around her kittinging box

Just before your cat starts having her kittens, she is likely to start settling down, ideally in her kittinging box.

Giving birth

Kittinging starts once strong contractions and straining begins.

- It usually takes 4-16 hours for all kittens to be born, but it can take longer.
- Your cat will have strong contractions, but crying is unusual and can indicate a problem.
- Both head first and tail first kittinging is normal (tail first may take a little longer).
- The first kitten is normally born within 30 minutes of straining starting and following kittens are usually born every 10-60 minutes.
- **WARNING: If your cat has been straining for 20-30 minutes without producing a kitten, there could be a problem - contact your vet.**
- Between each kitten, your cat should seem comfortable, lick and feed her newborn. Kittens are normally born inside a thin sac, which the mother will tear off, enabling them to breath.

- After each kitten, your cat should pass an afterbirth (placenta), which they may eat. The placenta is the structure that provides oxygen and nutrients to the kitten while its developing in the womb. A placenta should appear approximately 15 minutes after each kitten, however, they don't always come in order, i.e. a few kittens may be born before their placentas are passed. If not all placentas are passed, it's possible for an infection to develop in the weeks following kitting.
- **Contact your vet for advice if you are concerned at any point during your cat's kitting.**

After giving birth

After giving birth, your cat is likely to be very hungry, tired and need to rest. She will need to stay with her kittens to feed them and bond with them. Make sure they are in a quiet space, free from noise and disturbance. There is a risk that your cat may reject her kittens if she doesn't feel comfortable, relaxed and able to bond with them after giving birth. Your cat is likely to have a vaginal discharge for a few weeks after giving birth but it should not smell. Contact your vet if you are worried.

Problems kitting / when to contact your vet

Cats tend to have a lot fewer problems than dogs when giving birth to their young, so it's unlikely you'll need to get involved. However, it's important to keep an eye on your cat because occasionally problems do arise, especially in flat-faced pedigree cats such as Persians. Contact your vet if you notice any of the following problems:

Poorly mother

Have your cat checked if she seems unwell, or just 'not herself' before, during or after kitting.

Green discharge

If you see a green discharge coming from your cat's vulva, without a kitten, it can mean that the unborn kittens are in distress (blood and oxygen supply is failing).

Bleeding

You will see some fluid and bloody discharge during a kitting, but anything more than a few drips is abnormal and should be checked immediately by your vet.

Exhaustion

If your cat's labour continues for a long time, she may become exhausted and stop straining.

Straining but no kittens

Contact your vet urgently if your cat has been straining for 20-30 minutes without producing a kitten, there may be a blockage.

Kitten stuck

Very large or deformed kittens can become stuck in the pelvis. Sometimes they come halfway and sometimes they don't even get that far. If your cat has a kitten stuck inside her, call your vet for advice immediately, **do not pull the kitten.**

Sac problems

First time mothers may need help removing the sac from around their kittens. If a kitten's sac stays around their face for too long, they won't be able to breathe. Give your cat a chance to remove the sac themselves, by putting the kitten in front of them, if they don't act, you may need to tear a small hole in the sac and remove it yourself. If you are unsure about how to do this, call your vet immediately for advice.

Umbilical cord problems

First time mothers may need help removing their kittens' umbilical cords. Umbilical cords don't need to be removed straight away but, if they stay attached for too long they can cause problems and injuries. Call your vet for advice about how to tie umbilical cords.

No kittens

If your cat hasn't shown any signs of going into labour a few days after you expected her to, contact your vet.

Stillborn kittens

Have your cat checked if any of her kittens are born dead.

Treatment for dystocia (problems giving birth)



If your cat is having trouble giving birth, contact your vet straight away and try to give as much detail about your cat and her pregnancy as possible. Your vet may want to do the following:

- **An X-ray or scan:** to check the womb and unborn kittens.
- **Monitoring:** depending how your cat appears, your vet may decide to keep her in the hospital for monitoring and wait to see what happens. They will check her regularly and take further action if necessary.
- **Medication:** to help the womb contract more forcefully.
- **A caesarean:** this involves a general anaesthetic and surgery to remove the kittens.

FAQs

How long is a cat pregnant for?

Pregnancy normally lasts between 63-68 days, but it can vary by a few days.

What should I do if my cat is having problems kittening?

Always ring your vet, they will give you advice and tell you if any veterinary treatment is needed.

What are the risks of kittening?

It's rare for a cat to have problems kittening, but issues do occasionally arise. In the worst-case scenario, if severe problems

develop, your cat and her kittens could die. Contact your vet immediately if you notice any problems while your cat is giving birth.

Should I let my cat have kittens?

Your cat doesn't need to have kittens to live a normal healthy life, and there is an abundance of kittens and cats in rescue centres across the UK. PDSA recommends neutering before the first season to avoid unwanted pregnancies, especially if you're worried about dealing with the birth and finding homes for the kittens.

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