

# Pregnancy in Cats-All About Cat Pregnancy

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## Cat pregnancy at a glance:

- The gestation period of a cat is between 63-65 days.
- Cats can become pregnant as young as 4 months of age.
- Cats can mate with siblings or parents.
- An experienced veterinarian can confirm a cat is pregnant by the second or third week.
- Early signs of pregnancy include pinking up of the nipples between 15-21 days and weight gain around the fourth week.
- A cat can come into heat and become pregnant 6-8 weeks after giving birth.
- The average litter size is between 1-6 kittens.

## How long is a cat pregnant?

The gestation period for a cat is **63-65 days (approximately 9 weeks)**. This varies between cat though, and anywhere between 60 to 70 days is normal.

A pregnant cat is known as a **queen**, an entire male is known as a '**tom**' and the male who sires the litter of kittens is known as a **stud**.

## What age can a cat become pregnant?

A kitten can [come into heat](#) as young as four months of age. Signs that your cat is in heat can include the following:

- Persistent vocalisation
- If she is stroked, she may lay her front half low, and raise her hindquarters, treading up and down with her hind feet, and move her tail from side to side. This is known as *lordosis*
- Licking the genitals

Some breeds such as Siamese and Orientals tend to be a little more precocious than other cats. Obviously a pregnancy in a cat this young is extremely dangerous as she is not fully developed herself.

## Do littermates mate?

Yes, cats are not fussy who they mate with. Littermates can and will breed, fathers will mate with their daughters and mothers will mate with their sons. It is also possible for a female cat to become pregnant to more than one father.

## Signs of pregnancy:



It is not possible to determine a pregnancy via a blood or urine test in cats. However, there are often indicators that your cat is pregnant. The pet owner may notice weight gain around the **fourth week of pregnancy**.

Below is a timeline which covers both **kitten development** and **changes will occur in the queen** during the duration of her pregnancy.

## Cat pregnancy timeline

### Week 1 (0 – 7 days)

- **Kittens** – 20-24 hours after mating, the zygote, consisting of two cells forms. 4 – 6 days after mating, the ball (known as a morulae) consists of approximately 30 cells. Around five days after copulation, the morulae enters the uterine horn. By ten days, some blastocysts have hatched.
- **Mother** – There are no visible signs of pregnancy in your cat.

### Week 2 (8 – 14 days)

- **Kittens** – Implantation occurs 12-13 days after ovulation.
- **Mother** – Palpitation of the uterus is possible as early as day 15, round 1cm swellings within the uterus may be felt by an experienced veterinarian.

### Week 3 (15 – 21 days)

- **Kittens** – An ultrasound can detect the pregnancy and the fetal heartbeats visible. By 21 days the unborn kittens are between 1.2 and 2.5 cm. The fetal heartbeat can be detected around 22 days.
- **Mother** – The queen's nipples will become pink and enlarged. This is known as '*pinkening up*'. Some cats will develop morning sickness by the third week of pregnancy.

### Week 4 (22 – 28 days)

- **Kittens** – The embryo is now a fetus. The eyes and limbs are clearly forming, the toes on the forelimbs are starting to separate. Your veterinarian will be able to feel individual fetuses as discrete masses at this stage.
- **Mother** – By the fourth week of pregnancy, she should have gained enough weight to make her pregnancy visible.

### **Week 5 (29 – 35 days)**

- **Kittens** – The fetus is now approximately 58mm long from crown to rump. The limbs continue to grow, the claws and paw pads are now obvious. It will be difficult to feel individual kittens by 35 days.
- **Mother** – You may notice some behavioural changes in your cat, she may become more affectionate as her pregnancy progresses.

### **Week 6 (36 – 42 days)**

- **Kittens** – The bones of the fetuses have mineralised by 40-45 days and can be seen on an x-ray. The ear flaps, tail and genitalia are now obvious. The claws are well developed.
- **Mother** – The mother is obviously pregnant.

### **Week 7 (43 – 49 days)**

- **Kittens** – The hair follicles are beginning to develop. The skin is becoming thicker and the hair follicles are beginning to sprout hair.
- **Mother** – By this stage, the mother is quite large and becoming uncomfortable. You should be able to see and feel the kittens moving around at this stage.

### **Week 8 (50 – 56 days)**

- **Kittens** – By 56 days, the crown-rump length is 121 mm (4.76 inches). Pigmented hair now covers the body of the unborn kittens.
- **Mother** – The mother is still growing in size, she will be slowing down now due to discomfort. She may have toileting accidents.

### **Week 9 (57 – 63 days)**

- **Kitten** – By 60 days the kitten is approximately 145 mm (5.7 inches) long from crown to rump.
- **Mother** – The queen may show signs of nesting, her behaviour may change. Some can become quite clingy with their family, others prefer to be alone. She may start to produce milk.

## **How does my veterinarian confirm pregnancy?**

An experienced veterinarian will be able to palpitate the abdomen and feel the kittens around 17 – 25 days. Do NOT attempt to do this at home as you may cause miscarriage or damage to the developing kittens. After 32 days the developing fetuses and fetal membranes become difficult to distinguish.

The fetal bone structure can be seen on x-rays around the 43rd day. Avoid x-rays in early pregnancy.

Pregnancy can also be detected by ultrasound. By around day 26 the fetus and heartbeats can be seen.

## **Do cats suffer from morning sickness?**

Yes, cats can experience morning sickness. They may also go off their food around the third week of pregnancy.

## **Special requirements:**

Your cat should be up to date on her vaccinations prior to falling pregnant and be on a regular flea and worming regime.

Keep her indoors for the last two weeks of pregnancy to ensure she doesn't give birth to the kittens elsewhere.

You should take your queen to the veterinarian early in pregnancy for a health check, your veterinarian will also advise on the care of your queen during pregnancy. He/she will probably want to see the queen again in late pregnancy.

## What should I feed a pregnant cat?

A good quality, nutritious diet is important. Your veterinarian may recommend a kitten food for your queen as this contains higher protein and calcium. Avoid supplementing the diet unless your veterinarian has given the go-ahead to do so.

Avoid overfeeding and excessive weight gain as this can complicate labour.

Provide free access to clean, fresh drinking water.

## Do I need any equipment for the cat's birth?

- Kitting box. This can either be a sturdy cardboard box or a commercially available kitting box.
- Sterile surgical gloves.
- Eyedropper or syringe to aspirate the mouth and nose secretions.
- Dental floss or cotton thread to tie the umbilical cords.
- [Antiseptic](#) to apply to the umbilical stumps.
- Scissors.
- Clean towels.
- Your vet's phone number in an easy to reach place.
- An emergency vet's phone number.
- Kitten milk replacer.

## How to prepare for the birth:

During the last week of pregnancy, the kitting box should be placed in a warm, quiet, draft-free room which is off limits to children and other pets. She should be encouraged to sleep in this box.

Obviously, food, water, and a litter tray also need to be placed in this room.

The kitting box can be lined with old newspapers which can easily be changed or an old blanket. Make sure that the blanket isn't going to snag the kitten's claws. Change bedding daily.

Do not let the pregnant cat outside in the final week or two of pregnancy.

## Signs of labour in cats:

- The mammary glands increase in size during the last week of gestation.
- Around two days before the queen gives birth she will start producing milk.
- She may start nesting.
- Drop in temperature to around 99 F.
- Her appetite may wane in the last day or two of pregnancy.
- Change in behaviour. During the last week or so your queen may become either reclusive and seek out a secluded place or she may become more affectionate, especially if she is particularly bonded to one carer.

## Danger signs:

Seek veterinary attention immediately if you notice the following signs:

- Loss of appetite for more than 24 hours
- Elevated temperature
- Depression or lethargy
- Discharge from the vagina

## **Can I give my cat medications while pregnant?**

Some medications can cause birth defects and or abortion in pregnant cats so it is vital that you speak to your veterinarian before giving your cat any medications.

## **Can I worm my cat when she is pregnant?**

Yes, but not all worming medications are safe for pregnant cats and her unborn kitten, so speak to your veterinarian about an appropriate de-wormer. Worm the queen as usual, and again at 5 and 7 weeks gestation.

Please see this page which lists worming medications which can be used on [pregnant and lactating cats](#).

## **Can I treat my cat for fleas while she is pregnant?**

I believe there are some flea products which are safe to use on pregnant cats. These are available from your veterinarian, so it is best to speak to him/her. DON'T ever use a flea product on a pregnant or nursing cat without the okay from your veterinarian.

## **Other things to avoid when a cat is pregnant:**

Be careful with antiseptics such as Dettol as many are toxic to cats and also burn the skin. If you need to use any antiseptics, use one recommended by your veterinarian.

Avoid excessive handling of the newborn kittens – let the mother bond with her babies. Cats have been known to kill and eat their babies if threatened by other animals or too much human interference.

Reminder – Female cats can again become pregnant within as little as 2 weeks after giving birth but more usually between 8 weeks and 10 weeks so great care that the queen is kept safely confined during this time.

If you plan to desex your cat, wait until kittens are 7 weeks old. The mother can still nurse her kittens afterward.

## **Unplanned cat pregnancy:**

If this is an unplanned pregnancy are you prepared for the unexpected? Some problems which may be encountered are:

- Difficulty giving birth, requiring an emergency [c-section](#).
- Death of the mother.
- Death of the kittens.
- Rejection of kittens, this will mean that the kittens will have to be hand raised for the first few weeks. Hand raising kittens is a rewarding but challenging job, which requires around the clock feeding for several weeks.

## **Your responsibility:**

- Have you found suitable homes for the kittens?

- Microchipping is mandatory in some states in Australia, and all kittens must be microchipped before they go to their new homes. So please remember to factor this into your budget.
- Vaccinate and worm kittens before they go to their new homes.

## **How soon after giving birth can a cat come into heat again?**

It is possible for a cat to come into heat, mate and become pregnant between 6-8 weeks after giving birth.

Please remember that there is a huge problem with unwanted cats and the shelters are overflowing with cats desperately in need of a good home, so don't contribute to the overpopulation of cats unless you are a registered breeder.

## **Can a vet spay a pregnant cat?**

It is possible to spay a pregnant cat, but this will obviously lead to the loss of her unborn kittens. Some veterinarians may recommend waiting until after the queen has given birth, especially if she is far along in her pregnancy.