



Pregnant Cats & Moms + Kittens

A guide for pregnant cats and the care of a mom cat and her kittens

LOST OUR HOME PET RESCUE

July 1, 2018

PREGNANT CATS & MOMS + KITTENS

A guide for pregnant cats and the care of a mom cat and her kittens

Table of Contents:

Introduction	Page 1
Frequently Asked Questions	Pages 2 – 4
Preparing for Pregnant Cats and Mothers + Kittens	Pages 4 – 5
Potential Problems during Pregnancy	Pages 6 – 7
Assisting a Pregnant Cat with Birthing	Pages 7 – 10
Supplemental Bottle-Feeding/How to Bottle-Feed	Pages 10 – 11
Weaning Kittens	Page 11
Emergency Protocol	Page 12

Note: This manual is only meant to provide information about pregnant cats, birthing, and the immediate care of newborn kittens with their mothers. Please make sure to refer to the “Kitten Foster Manual” for more information regarding raising kittens after birth.

Introduction:

Thank you for your interest in fostering with Lost Our Home Pet Rescue! By opening your heart and your home to these mother cats that are desperately in need, you are helping to save lives. Our foster program is crucial for the pregnant cats and mothers with newborn kittens that enter our shelter because kittens are some of the most at-risk pets in shelters. Mother cats also require a calm environment to remain stress-free during the birth and upbringing of their kittens. You can seek out basic information in this foster manual, but please do not hesitate to contact our program manager with any further questions.

Please note that this manual is only for pregnant cats and the beginning stages of a mother + kittens. You will need to reference the kitten foster manual as well for kitten specific care.

Foster Contact: Fostering@lostourhome.org

Frequently Asked Questions:

How long is a cat pregnant for?

On average, cats are pregnant for 63 days (approximately 2 months). However, the range of pregnancy for a cat may range anywhere from 58 to 70 days.

How far along is a cat in her pregnancy?

Once cats are approximately 3 weeks into their pregnancy, their nipples will enlarge and become very pink. This is a good indicator as to how far along a cat is in her pregnancy. Another option is to have an ultrasound done through a veterinarian, though unfortunately the price to have this done is a minimum of \$300 and up, so we typically will not have this done.

How much time do I need to spend with the mother and her kittens?

As much time as you can. During pregnancy mother cats are undergoing a great deal of stress, so keeping them as happy as possible during their pregnancy is best for them. Most times, the pregnant cat will be very affectionate; as the time for birthing gets closer, they may (understandably) express a “moodier” attitude. During the first few weeks of the kittens

being born the mother may prefer interaction being limited, but this will vary between cats. It is still very important that the kittens learn to be social with humans.

How many kittens will my pregnant cat give birth to?

There is no way to guarantee how many kittens a mother will give birth to. The average litter is between 3 and 5 kittens; however it could very well be more or less.

How long will I need to foster the mother cat?

It is very important that a mother stays with her kittens until they are able to be weaned (eat on their own without her), which typically occurs around 5 weeks of age. The mother cat plays a crucial role in teaching kittens healthy behaviors and habits such as how to use the restroom, how to bathe themselves, how to play, and so on.

How long will I need to foster the kittens?

Once a kitten weighs two pounds, he/she can be spayed or neutered and then put up for adoption, so you should expect to have your foster kittens until they are of weight (2.5 lbs). This typically occurs at around 8 to 9 weeks of age, but keep in mind, it's the weight not the date that matters!

Can the mother cat and/or her kittens be around personal pets?

No. Mother cats are very protective of their kittens and do not typically interact well with other animals during the time of pregnancy and while she is raising her kittens. She will likely see your other pets as a risk, leaving her very stressed and unhappy. Mother cats and their kittens must be kept in a separate room of the house at all times.

Will any of my foster kittens die?

Sadly, kittens are fragile, so it is always possible for them to become ill and pass away while in a foster home. This may be the hardest thing about fostering kittens. If it's something you don't want to encounter, then fostering kittens may not be the best fit for you. But please keep in mind that without foster homes, most of these kittens would not stand a chance of survival in a shelter. You're helping to save lives.

What do foster families need to provide? What does the shelter provide?

Foster families need to provide:

- A calm, stress-free, environment for the mother cat and her kittens
- Transportation to and from Lost Our Home, as well as to the veterinary office as needed
- Socialization and cuddle time to help teach the kittens about positive family and pet relationships

Lost Our Home will provide:

- Food (wet and dry)
- Litter
- Bedding, blankets, and towels
- Toys
- A scale to weight the kittens
- Veterinary care (with authorization)
- Other needed supplies that are available

Preparing for Pregnant Cats & Mother Cats + Kittens:

Mother cats, also known as “queens,” need to be in a calm environment so that they can be stress-free and feel like they are keeping their kittens safe. Sometimes, stress can cause a mother cat to become aggressive or to not care for her babies properly. With that in mind, choose a private and quiet room of your home, away from the daily activities of your family, in which to situate the mother cat and her kittens.

It’s also important that they be kept away from other pets in the home. Other pets can be perceived as a threat by the mother cat and cause her to act aggressively to protect her young.

Supplies you’ll need:

Lost Our Home will supply all needed supplies, however we do greatly appreciate any supplies that you can help with. Please remember that donations (even for kittens that you’re fostering) are tax deductible! Just save your receipts and we can write you donation

receipts at the shelter. Here is what you will need specifically for a pregnant mother cat. See the “Kitten Foster Manual” for more detailed information on kitten specific items.

- A box or kennel without a top (a whelping box)
- Puppy pads (to line the whelping box)
- Blankets/towels
- High nutrient kitten food – mother cats should begin eating kitten food in the weeks leading up to birth through the weaning stage. The nutrients and calories they receive from kitten food is much needed at this time.

Bringing home a pregnant cat or a mother + babies:

Set up your fostering room before you bring the mother cat (and babies) home. You should put the litter box as far away from the mother cat’s food and water bowls as possible, and provide a couple of different safe places where she can care for her kittens. A dark area equipped with a whelping box is ideal.

A whelping box is a box that is large enough for the mother cat to lie on her side slightly away from her kittens with all of the kittens in the box with her. The box should have sides high enough to prevent the kittens from wandering away, but low enough so it’s easy for the mother cat to come and go as she needs to. Lining the bottom of the box with puppy pads topped with newspapers will help absorb moisture. You can place an easy-to-clean blanket on top of the absorbent materials to give the mother cat and kittens a soft place to lie on. Please keep all these materials dry so that the kittens are not chilled by dampness. Do not place straw, hay or shavings in the area where the mother and kittens are kept.

When you bring the pregnant cat (or a mother + kitten) home, put them in the designated fostering room and close the door, allowing the mom to explore on her own. Give her a couple of hours before you enter her room and don’t be alarmed if it takes a few days for her to stop hiding.

Potential Health Problems during Pregnancy:

Cats may sometimes be prone to certain problems, either during pregnancy or after parturition. In general, any unusual symptoms during gestation should be followed up with by contacting the program manager in case of non-emergency, or utilizing the emergency protocol in case of a potential emergency. This is an important part of the care of a pregnant cat.

Although many pregnant cats go through gestation trouble-free, there are potential problems that can occur. Learn to spot the specific symptoms of trouble and what action to take to ensure the health of a pregnant cat and her fetuses. The following are a few conditions to be aware of, so that you can spot the symptoms if they should occur, and take proper action.

- **Eclampsia:** The depletion of calcium in the blood stream can result in eclampsia, a life-threatening disease, which sometimes can occur during the last stages of pregnancy. A calcium supplement can help prevent this potential problem, particularly when caring for a pregnant stray cat, whose previous diet was undoubtedly minimal.

Symptoms of Eclampsia

Behavioral Symptoms: Includes restlessness, pacing, panting, and irritability.

Physical Symptoms: May include drooling, stiffness in gait, loss of coordination, and pain on walking.

Final stages of eclampsia include muscle spasms and seizure-like activity. Eclampsia is a veterinary emergency, and the cat should be seen immediately by a veterinarian at the first signs of symptoms.

- **Spontaneous Abortion:** Poor health of the pregnant cat or certain infections may result in malformed fetuses, which will be aborted spontaneously. Symptoms include fever, bleeding from the vagina, inappetence, and depression. Aborted fetuses may or may not be found, as the queen may eat them.

All symptoms of abortion should be considered a veterinary emergency, and the pregnant cat should be seen immediately. She will need to be examined in case she retains any remaining fetuses, alive or dead.

- **Resorption:** Resorption is an interesting phenomenon in which a dead fetus is completely absorbed by the queen's system. There are rarely any outward symptoms when resorption occurs, which leads to the "pregnant one day, no longer pregnant the next" mystery. However, when this phenomenon seems to have occurred, a veterinary visit is essential to ensure that there are no remaining fetuses inside the queen.

Assisting a Pregnant Cat with Birthing:

The big day has arrived, so what do you need to do? This process is technically called "queening." Chances are that you will not need to do anything to help with the birth process except to be with your cat to encourage her. You may even wake one morning to discover that your pregnant cat has given birth during the night, and is comfortably nursing her kittens.

However, you should know how to spot potential problems and what action to take, should she need assistance with the birth process.

Signs of Impending Labor:

- **Nesting** - She may start snooping around in closets and secluded areas for an appropriate place to bear her kittens. The time is ripe for you to prepare an area for her in a private place, with a box or basket lined with soft towels. She may decide instead to give birth on the cold, hard floor of your bathroom, but at least you have tried to accommodate her needs.
- **Behavioral Changes** - These include restless pacing, panting, excessive grooming (especially in the area of her genitals), and excessive vocalization. She may also be overly affectionate, or the complete opposite. Personality change is normal at this time.

- **Physical Signs of Labor** - There may be a drop in normal body temperature. The cat may vomit. The abdomen may "drop" a few days before labor, and the nipples may become larger and pinker.
- **Active Labor** - Contractions will start and you will see the appearance of the amniotic sac. You may also see a discharge of blood or other colored fluid.

Your biggest role may be to prepare the birthing area and move your queen into it.

Supplies for the Birthing Area

1. Newspapers to line the delivery box. Place a stack in the bottom of the box and remove one-by-one as they become soiled.
1. Clean towels for helping to clean and stimulate the kittens, if necessary.
2. Paper towels for the same purpose.
3. An extra box for placing the kittens in while the queen is still birthing. Place a heating pad in the bottom of the box with a blanket or several towels over it. The idea is to keep the kittens from being chilled, without burning them. Never place them directly on a heating pad. Drape another clean towel over the top of the box to hold the heat in and to keep out drafts.
4. A laundry basket or extra box for discarding soiled towels

What Happens During Kitten Birthing?

Chances are that you will not need to do anything to help with the birth process except to be with your cat to encourage her - sort of a "cat doula." You may even wake one morning to discover that your pregnant cat has given birth during the night, and is comfortably nursing her kittens. However, you should know how to spot potential problems and what action to take, should she need assistance with the birth process.

During the birth process, rhythmical uterine contractions gradually increase to push the fetus out of the uterus and into the birth canal. The placentas may be expelled at the same time as the kittens, or within 24 hours after birth. The kittens are born within their amniotic

sacs, which the queen will remove. If she ignores the kitten and it is still in its sac, it will be up to you to carefully cut the sac and stimulate the kitten's breathing by rubbing it gently with a rough dry towel. It is a good practice to count the placentas to make sure all are expelled. If a placenta is retained, veterinary intervention is needed.

The mother cat will stimulate the kittens to breathe by washing them with her rough tongue.

She will also sever the umbilical cord by chewing on it approximately one inch from the kitten's body. At this time, she may eat the placenta. The kittens will immediately gravitate toward a nipple, latch on, and commence to nurse, as can be seen in the accompanying photo.

There is often a 10 to 60 minute delay between births, although longer periods of time are not uncommon. If there is a delay of over four hours and you are sure there are remaining kittens, the queen should be examined by a veterinarian.

Length of Time for the Total Birth Process

In general, it may take up to six hours for a queen to give birth to all her kittens. The first kitten should arrive within an hour of the start of active labor, and subsequent kittens will take anywhere from 30 to 60 minutes. She will rest for 15 minutes or so between kittens, and during this time she should be allowed to nurse and clean the kittens that have been born. If you have been keeping the kittens in another box, move them back with the mother cat and help them find a nipple.

Summary of Potential Problems during Labor

- Extended Contractions without Birth - More than one hour of strong contractions indicates a veterinary emergency, and your cat should be seen by a vet immediately. Take her and any kittens to your vet.
- Retained Placenta - A retained placenta can cause uterine infection. It is important to count the number of placentas (one per kitten) to keep on top of this potential problem.

- Kitten Lodged in the Birth Canal - A kitten that is lodged in the birth canal for more than 10 minutes is in distress, and your intervention may be necessary. Note that although most kittens are born head first, "breech," or tail-first births occur about 40% of the time, and are considered normal.
- Stillborn Kittens - Sadly, this sometimes happens. All you can do is to remove the baby from the area so the mother can continue uninterrupted with birthing the other kittens.
- Postpartum Hemorrhaging - Although some bleeding after giving birth is normal, excessive hemorrhaging is an emergency and calls for veterinary intervention. Utilize the emergency protocol.

Once all the kittens are born, your queen will normally be caring for and feeding them.

Supplemental Bottle-Feeding/How to Bottle-Feed:

Although a mother cat will take care of most of the feeding, sometimes supplemental bottle feeding will be required. This is done because sometimes smaller kittens may be pushed aside or may be having trouble latching on to the mother's nipple. In these cases, you will need to bottle feed to make sure the kitten is staying full and receiving much needed nutrients.

1. Warm the formula: Place the bottle in a bowl of hot water for a few minutes. Before feeding the kittens, always test the temperature of the formula by placing a few drops on your inner wrist to be sure it is not too hot. It should be slightly warmer than your body temperature.
2. Ensure that your foster kitten is warm before offering food. Do not attempt to feed a kitten who is chilled because it can have serious health consequences.
3. Wrap the kitten in a towel or blanket and position him so that his belly is toward the floor. Kittens should not be fed on their backs or in an upright position.
4. Turn the bottle upside down and allow a drop of formula to come out. Place the bottle nipple in the kitten's mouth and gently move it back and forth, holding the bottle at a 45-degree angle to keep air from getting into the kitten's stomach. This movement should encourage the kitten to start eating. If at first you don't succeed,

wait a few minutes and try again. Usually the kitten will latch on and begin to suckle. If the bottle appears to be collapsing, gently remove the nipple from the kitten's mouth and let more air return to the bottle.

Week 1: Bottle-feeding

Amount: 3–4 cc per feeding, approximately 3–6 g per kitten

Week 2: Bottle-feeding

Amount: 5–6 cc per feeding, approximately 8–15 g per kitten

Week 3: Bottle-feeding

Amount: 13–17 cc per feeding, approximately 10–20 g per kitten

Weaning Kittens:

Once your kittens are about four weeks old, it is time to start the weaning process. Beginning at four weeks, start offering warm gruel (two parts wet food, one part formula), along with dry kitten food and water. Every four to six hours, discard any uneaten gruel and provide a fresh batch. It is normal for the kittens to still nurse on their mother occasionally, but given the option, they will choose her milk over kitten food. This is why once the kittens have learned to eat gruel (approximately 5 weeks of age), the mother should be separated from them to prevent continued nursing.

To get a kitten interested in trying the gruel, you may have to offer the gruel with a spoon or use your finger to place a small amount on the kitten's tongue. Ideally, by the end of five weeks, your foster kittens will be happily eating dry and wet food on their own.

Making gruel:

Mix 1/2 can of wet food with 1/4 can of formula per kitten. You can add a little water if the kittens seem to like a looser consistency. It's OK make gruel in bulk and refrigerate it, but you'll need to warm it before offering it to the kittens.

Emergency Protocol:

All LOH foster parents are expected to monitor the health of the foster pets in their care. Specifically Foster Parents are responsible for:

- Transporting animals in their care to and from appointments with LOH authorized veterinarians. These vet appointments will be arranged through a LOH staff member.
 - Foster Parents are **NOT** to schedule their own vet appointments. LOH only pays for medical costs approved in advance and coordinated through our network of approved veterinarians.
-

In the event of such an emergency:

- **Call the Shelter & Medical Director Emily Vivian at (480) 226-3228 (TEXT IS BEST- personal cell phone for foster use only).**
 - **If you are unable to reach Emily, please contact the Shelter Operations Manager Kris Shaffer at (623) 734-2259 (personal cell phone for foster use only).**
-