



BREEDING YOUR CAT

FACT SHEET 4

CARING FOR YOUR CAT FROM CONCEPTION TO WEANING

PREPARATION

Although the time, work and expense involved in breeding a cat is much less than with a dog, you will still need to think carefully before going ahead. You will have to consider the extra feeding and care that your cat will require and think about finding a suitable area for kitting and for the after-care of the kittens. Bear in mind that not all pregnancies are planned and that the amount of work involved will be just as much for an accidental pregnancy.

An average litter consists of four kittens, but your cat could have as many as seven. It is important for you to be sure that you will be able to cope during the birth and with the after-care of both the queen and kittens. Remember that the kittens will be with you until they are at least eight weeks old, by which time each one will be independent and will require a lot of individual attention and adequate space to explore. You will also need to find good homes for them, so be prepared to advertise and to receive callers at your house.

You will need to have a designated space, familiar to the queen, where she can give birth to her kittens. It should be equipped with newspaper, old towels and a litter tray and have a separate feeding area. Make sure that the queen has room to move within the space or bed without harming her kittens and that it is enclosed to prevent the kittens wandering off before they are able to fend for themselves. Despite all your efforts, however, it is not unheard of for a queen to decide at the last minute that she wants to give birth in some other place. As her time draws near, watch her closely so that you are not caught by surprise.

In the final stages of pregnancy, you will have to make some changes to your queen's diet so that she is nutritionally prepared for the extra burden that will be placed on her while providing for the developing kittens. This will also apply to the period when the kittens are feeding from her. She may also require veterinary attention at some stage of the pregnancy, or even a caesarean section should she have difficulty when kitting. This, together with bedding, extra food, advertising, worming preparations and vaccinations for any kittens not re-homed, can all add to the overall cost.

If you decide that you do not wish to breed your cat, the kindest thing would be to have her spayed. This is normally carried out at six months of age and when she is not in season. There is no evidence to suggest that a cat that is not allowed to have a litter will suffer any health problems as a result. Spaying usually only involves a day's stay at the veterinary surgery. Check with your own vet as to their policy, procedure and cost.

WHERE TO START

If you do decide to breed from your cat, make sure she is in good health and is up to date with worming and, where appropriate, her vaccinations. For a planned breeding you will also need to be aware of the best time to mate your cat, so you should be familiar with her reproductive cycle.

OESTRUS

If you do not have your cat spayed, she will come into season at approximately 6 months of age. Breeding seasons are usually between March and June and late July to early September, when the weather is fine. A queen is in season, or on heat, for between 3–5 days, and will then have a resting period lasting approximately one week before the signs of heat return. While on heat, she will accept the male. As cats are induced ovulators, the stimulation of mating causes the release of eggs from the ovaries. Fertilization of the eggs occurs some 24-36 hours later. As most cats remain on heat for five days, those allowed to roam free may be mated several times so that a litter may consist of kittens sired by several different tomcats.

Your cat's behaviour may change drastically when she is on heat and this is often characterised by a distinct vocal 'calling', writhing on her back or crouching down with her back in the air. In fact, some cats behave in such an odd or exaggerated manner that many owners think they are in pain.

PLANNED MATINGS

Unless an accidental mating has occurred, an arrangement is normally made with someone locally who has an entire tom or a breeder with a stud cat. Before mating, make sure your female cat is fully prepared for pregnancy and the birth. Use a worming preparation to eliminate any internal parasites and ensure that she is free from fleas and ear mites, all of which she could pass on to her newborn kittens.

Once mating has taken place, the next thing is to determine whether or not it has been successful. Approximately 3 weeks after the mating take your cat to the vet, who should be able to detect any embryos that may be present. At this stage, they are small and a little like hard marbles in the uterus, but after 3 weeks they become surrounded by fluid and are not so easy to palpate. A blood test can be carried out to confirm the findings and, once the skeletons of the foetuses are developed, they will show on an X-ray, although this is not used routinely to confirm pregnancy.

Outward signs of the pregnancy should be visible from about the 6th week. These include a widening of the cat's abdomen and, in the later stages, enlargement of the mammary glands and teats. Movement of the kittens can also be seen in some cases.

FEEDING DURING PREGNANCY & LACTATION

For the first 5 weeks of your cat's pregnancy, feed her as normal. From this time on, the kittens will be making demands on her resources and she will require a higher energy intake, which can be up to four times her normal maintenance requirements. This will need to be continued throughout birth and lactation.

From the 5th week onwards, increase her daily amount of food by approximately 10% each week and try to feed a high protein diet, such as **Denes Kitten With**

Rabbit & Chicken. At this stage you will need to feed the daily requirement as several small meals over the day. This is because the capacity of your cat's stomach will be reduced, as the kittens will be taking up a lot of room by this time. An ideal and easy way of feeding her during this period is to allow her to eat as much food as she will take.

You will need to continue feeding your cat more food than normal throughout the lactation period, until the kittens are weaned at between 6 and 8 weeks of age. Depending on the number of kittens she is feeding, you may find her food intake is even greater than during pregnancy, although she may visibly lose weight.

KITTENING

The first stage

Pregnancy lasts 63 days, on average, and the first clues that the kitting process has begun, will be a search for an ideal place to have the kittens. You may well notice your cat shredding up paper to make a nest. Cats are usually very determined to choose their own location for kitting themselves and will often completely ignore any area that you may have put aside for the event. The best way of dealing with this is to allow her to select a place herself and then try to put some bedding around and make it as comfortable as possible.

The second stage

This stage begins with straining. After a while, you will see a fluid-filled sac appear at the vulva, followed by the first kitten covered in another sac-like membrane, the amniotic sac. At this point, your cat should turn round and break the sac and then release the kitten. As the kitten will be wet from the fluids, she should start to clean it up and then lick it dry. This is often done in a very rough fashion, which helps stimulate the kitten to breathe. Finally, your cat should bite through the umbilical cord, separating the kitten from the afterbirth.

You will need to watch throughout this stage very carefully. If your cat fails to take an interest in the kitten for whatever reason, then you will have to take responsibility for cleaning up the kitten and severing the cord yourself with clean scissors. Try to crush the cord as you cut through it (about 2" from the umbilicus) as this will reduce the chances of it bleeding. Having done this, ensure that the kitten is warm and comfortable while you wait for the other kittens to arrive. Some kittens will have difficulty breathing and will need some help. One of the main causes of this is fluid in the airways. The best way of dealing with the problem is to hold the kitten head downwards to allow the fluid to drain out and gently rub the chest to help expel the fluid and stimulate breathing.

The third stage

This is the final part and is the stage where the afterbirth appears. In the wild, after the birth, the queen would eat the placenta, as it provides a good source of nutrition during a period in which she would be unable to hunt. Your cat may also want to instinctively do the same. Since this is natural behaviour, it should not cause her any digestive problems.

KEEPING A CLOSE WATCH

Many cats prefer to have very little outside interference during kitting and would much rather get on with the whole process by themselves. It is a good idea to keep a discrete eye on things from a distance and offer encouragement and

help only when needed. For most queens, kittening is a pleasant experience during which they will purr contentedly. Any marked change in behaviour warrants a closer look, as there may be a problem.

Normally, after the first kitten arrives, the others should follow easily. If your cat strains for more than 30 minutes without delivering a kitten or seems agitated, then you should seek veterinary help. You will need to be prepared to take your cat to the surgery so that the vet can offer the best help with all the necessary equipment to hand. The journey will often help speed things up and, as long as any kittens are kept warm, they will survive quite well for several hours. In some instances you may need to give help urgently, for example if a kitten appears partly delivered. Gently grasp the kitten a little behind the ribcage, using a clean towel or kitchen paper, and carefully pull downwards away from the mother's back. Avoid using force and try to pull only when the cat strains.

AFTERCARE

After all the kittens have arrived, your cat should settle and allow them to feed readily. Check carefully that all the kittens are active and that they can find their way to the teats, moving any that seem lost towards the queen. You will also need to make sure that all the cords have been severed properly and that none are bleeding. Make sure that they are all kept warm with plenty of bedding and away from draughts.

Over the following few days make sure that your cat eats sufficiently well. If her appetite is poor, or she appears to run a temperature, then seek veterinary help. You should also check for any hardening or reddening of the mammary glands, which might signify a bout of mastitis, and for any unusual discharge from the vagina, which could indicate a womb infection. If you are at all concerned, you should take your cat to your vet.

LACTATION & WEANING

Initially, after the birth, your cat's appetite may decrease for a very short period, especially if she has eaten the placenta and any of the membranes. Following this period, her food intake should increase as the lactation period is a very demanding time nutritionally. If she fails to eat properly, then her milk supply will dry up and the kittens will fail to thrive. Even though her appetite will increase you may find that her body weight drops. It is not unusual for this situation to continue until the kittens are weaned.

By the age of 3 or 4 weeks, the kittens should be starting to eat some solid food. Ideally, you should feed a high quality food designed to meet the needs of growing kittens, such as **Denes Kitten With Rabbit & Chicken plus added herbs**. The food should be placed in shallow dishes to allow the kittens to find it easily. Gradually, they should eat more and more solid food and feed from the queen less and less.

Weaning should be completed when the kittens are between 6 and 8 weeks, by which time the queen should have started to regain some of her lost condition and increased her body weight. Her milk should have dried up by this time although, occasionally, one or two kittens may continue to try and suckle her. If you are sure that milk production has ceased, then you should think seriously about having her spayed, especially if you do not plan to breed again.

HOW DENES CAN HELP

Denes have several products that can help before, during and after pregnancy.

- **Denes Raspberry Leaf Tablets**

Raspberry Leaf has a long, traditional association with assisting kittening and whelping and can help:

- Strengthen the pelvic muscles
- Tone the uterus
- Reduce the risk of haemorrhage

Tablets should be started at the time of mating and continued until two days after the birth of the kittens.

- **Denes All-in-One Tablets**

Based on seaweed, parsley, watercress, elderberry and wheatgerm oil, **Denes All-in-One Tablets** supply a wide range of essential, naturally derived vitamins, minerals and trace elements. This is a useful general supplement to give your cat throughout her pregnancy. All in One should also be given throughout the lactation period and well into the period beyond, particularly if she has lost condition.

If you normally give your cat **Denes Garlic Tablets** then you can continue to give these throughout the pregnancy.

If you have any queries concerning your pet's health or feeding problems, you can contact us for free pet care advice by:

- Visiting our website www.denes.com
- Emailing us at info@denes.com
- Calling us on **01273 325364** Mon-Fri, 9am – 12Noon
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