

Pregnant Cat & Mum & Kittens Guide



Thank you so much for fostering with Animal Welfare League NSW! Foster families are essential to helping us save lives. We really appreciate you!

Table of Contents

<i>BEFORE bringing your pregnant cat or mum and kittens home.....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Bringing your mum [and kittens] home</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Fostering a pregnant cat</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Daily Weighing</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Mum with kittens under 4 weeks old.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Mum with kittens at 4 weeks old</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Weaning.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Basic Socialisation of Kittens.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Bathing/cleaning kittens</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>When can mum cat get desexed and go up for adoption?</i>	<i>5</i>

BEFORE bringing your pregnant cat or mum and kittens home

Mum cat needs a quiet and calm environment in which to take care of her babies. If mum cat is feeling stressed or unsafe, she may not take care of her babies properly and in worst case scenarios, become aggressive towards them. A separate room well away from constant activity and noises is required. If there are any other pets in the home, they must be kept separate from the mum and kittens at all times.

Ensure the room is set up with a safe space (nest), for mum to be in with her babies. Ideas for this include a cardboard box (with 1 side cut so it is low enough for mum cat to get in but high enough for newborn kittens not to jump out. 15cm tall should be sufficient), or a clean, large empty large litter tray lined with towels. Ensure the nest has warm blankets or towels placed inside and it can be a good idea to give mum cat more than 1 option to choose from.

Litter trays should be as far away from food/water as possible (but still be in the same room) and ideally have low sides for when the kittens are ready to start using the trays.

Pregnant cats and mum cats with babies can eat up to 4 times their normal amount of food and should be eating kitten food. Dry kitten food should be available for her at all times, until the kittens are fully weaned and water should also permanently be available for her.

Bringing your mum [and kittens] home

Place the cat carrier in the room and leave it covered (except for the door of the carrier) with a blanket then open the carrier door. Let the mum cat explore the area in her own time

Pregnant Cat & Mum & Kittens Guide



and do not attempt to pat her or pick her up. Wait until she feels comfortable and initiates contact with you before handling her and stop patting her at the first signs of discomfort. These signs may include: swishing tail, ears laid back or to the sides, the area where you were petting her tensing up, a cranky overdrawn meow, moving away, hissing, or growling.

Fostering a pregnant cat

Fostering a pregnant cat can be one of the most memorable and educational experiences you'll ever have! We have included all the info you'll need to know and what to expect, to prepare for your foster cat to give birth.

The gestation period for a cat is approximately 63 days (9 weeks). For several weeks leading up to giving birth, mum cat may change her behaviour and could either become extremely affectionate or potentially aggressive or fearful. This is generally not concerning as mum cats hormones can affect her behaviour at this time.

Giving birth

In general, you don't need to intervene at all in the birthing process and mum cat should take care of everything. But there may be rare circumstances where you may need to assist.

When mum cat is about to give birth, she will generally pace around the room, groom herself more and/or make unusual noises. This means she will give birth within a few hours but could be up to 24 hours. She will then go to her birthing nest; leave her alone and don't try and pick her up or move her as this could stress her out. She should then begin to give birth – she may make loud sounds – this is completely normal and not a cause for concern.

When labour starts, there will be brownish fluids and a small amount of blood.

1. Each kitten will come out in its own amniotic sac which mum cat should break immediately after giving birth to each kitten. If mum cat doesn't break it within 15 seconds, you'll need to step in and break it with a clean towel (don't use anything sharp to avoid risking hurting the kitten and be sure to wear gloves) and then give the kitten back to mum cat.
2. Mum cat should immediately begin to lick the kitten to clean it – if this doesn't then wipe the mucous/fluid from the kitten's face and mouth with a clean towel (wear gloves) - then the kitten should cry out!
3. The kitten should still be attached to the placenta, which should be passed by the mum cat several minutes after the kitten. When the placenta is out, mum cat should bite into it to cut it. It may take her a few minutes to do this. If this does not happen after about 5 minutes, you can get a piece of dental floss and put it around the umbilical cord, at least 2.5cm away from the kitten. Then you can pull it together quickly which should break the umbilical cord. Mum cat will generally then eat the placenta.

Additional info:

- A new kitten should come out of mum cat every 10-60 minutes approx.

Pregnant Cat & Mum & Kittens Guide



- On average, a mum cat will give birth to 4 kittens but it could be as few as 2 or as many as about 9.
- If there are any stillborn kittens (this is sadly quite common), remove it ASAP away from the nest and mum cat.
- Kittens should start to feed off mum cat within 1-2 hours after being born.
- It is fine for mum cat to eat placenta's if she chooses to, this is normal.
- Umbilical cord stays attached to each kitten until day 3-5 when it falls off
- Kittens are generally 80-120g when born. Any kitten under 80g when born may require more assistance.
- Q fever is a bacterial infection that can affect humans and in very rare circumstances, can transmit to a human during the process of a cat giving birth. We recommend wearing gloves and a mask during this process. You can also get vaccinated for it (at your own expense).

When mum cat is finished giving birth, please contact the Foster Care Mentor (Kemps Creek Carers) or Welfare Officer (branch carers) with the number of kittens that were born and their colours.

Medical emergencies during the birthing process are uncommon but they can occur. They include:

- If mum cat is getting contractions for more than 90 minutes without giving birth to a kitten, contact the AWL NSW Vet clinic immediately (Kemps Creek carers only) or the Welfare Officer (AWL NSW branch carers) of your branch. This 'could' indicate a retained kitten which could be fatal for mum cat and/or any remaining kittens, and a c-section may be required.
- Retained Placenta: if the placenta is not passed, it can cause infection. 1 should come out per kitten but there could be 1 between 2 kittens if there are twins. It should be noted that this is very uncommon.
- If kittens are not feeding off mum cat within the first 2 hours of being born. If they aren't feeding after 1 hour, try putting the kittens on mums nipples (wash your hands first before handling them).
- Anything else abnormal and different to the 3 steps mentioned above could potentially be an emergency. A stillborn kitten is not an emergency.
- If all kittens are feeding well except a weak, runt that mum may have also rejected, contact the AWL NSW vet clinic (Kemps Creek carers only) or Foster Care Mentor (Kemps Creek carers only) or Welfare Officer (branch carers only) urgently. An experienced bottle-feeding carer may then take on the kitten if appropriate.

Daily Weighing

One of the most important things to remember to do when fostering kittens is weigh each kitten daily, at the same time each day from newborn up to 7 weeks. Kittens are a lot more likely to pass away in foster if not weighed every day as a weight decrease/plateauing is a strong indication that someone is wrong and vet assistance is needed. Note: If mum cat seems protective over her kittens, you can wait until the following day after being born to start weighing them.

Pregnant Cat & Mum & Kittens Guide



Each kitten should put on at least 10g each day. If a kitten loses weight for 1 day or plateau's for 2 days, contact the Kemp's Creek Shelter Vet Clinic (Kemp's Creek carers only) or Welfare Officer (branch carers only) ASAP. Mum cat does not need to be weighed.

Mum with kittens under 4 weeks old

Kittens are born with their eyes closed and limited hearing. They find their way to mum cat from her warmth. By about 1 week, their ears start to open and at 7-14 days their eyes (blue in colour) start to open. By 2 weeks, their ears should be fully open and they start to crawl.

When the kittens are under 3 weeks of age, mum cat will usually do everything necessary to feed and clean the kittens. She will initiate nursing and take care of feeding, grooming and toileting. The mother cat will take care of the kittens toileting through what is known as anogenital grooming, whereby she will consume all faecal matter and urine of the kittens.

By 3 weeks, the kittens start urinating on their own, their teeth start to come through and they take wobbly steps.

Kittens under 4 weeks can't regulate their own body temperature so it's important that the room is not cold (21-24 degrees is ideal) and the kittens are kept with mum.

Watch that each kitten always gets a feed from mum cat. Also, if there are more kittens than teats then you may need to swap kittens around so they all get a feed on mum cat. If there's a runt that is smaller than the rest of the litter, make sure that kitten feeds enough from mum cat and isn't pushed away by the bigger kittens. You may need to keep placing the runt on one of mums nipples and make sure the other kittens aren't pushing him/her away.

Mum with kittens at 4 weeks old

When the kittens are around 4 weeks of age, mum cat will gradually stop toileting them and they will toilet near the nest. This is when a low sided litter tray should be placed nearby for the kittens to use. Kittens will generally figure this out pretty quickly themselves although it will likely be messy and require more frequent litter box cleaning on your part!

The kittens will also start playing and their balance improves. **Start the weaning process now at 4 weeks.**

Weaning

From 3-4 weeks, the kittens should start to show some interest in mum cats food (start to use a bowl with low sides). Let them explore and try to eat her food if they choose to.

By 4 weeks, if the kitten's aren't eating mum cats food yet, try putting separate bowls with wet kitten food mixed with water (or dry food mixed with water and let it soak) and place the kitten at the bowl with their face in front of the food. Over time, decrease the amount of water you have mixed in (if any) until they're eating plain wet/dry kitten food.

Pregnant Cat & Mum & Kittens Guide



Water should be provided at all times and the kittens may still drink from mum cat as well as the solid food.

By 5-5.5 weeks, they should be eating wet and dry kitten food (without being mixed with water) by themselves and they may also feed off mum as well. By 8 weeks, you should ensure the kittens are no longer feeding from mum cat. Be prepared - weaning is a messy process! *If your kittens are struggling to become weaned or are not weaned by 6 weeks of age, please contact the Foster Care Mentor if you are a Kemps Creek carer (or the Welfare Officer if you are a carer for an AWL NSW branch) for further advice.*

Basic Socialisation of Kittens

Handling of kittens should be kept to a minimum until the kitten is 3 weeks old. Between 2-7 weeks (can be up to 14 weeks), they enter a critical socialisation period and what you do (or don't do!) in this time will make a huge difference to the rest of the kittens life.

From 3 weeks of age, a kitten should be handled gently and regularly to help them grow into friendly, confident kittens. Weighing daily helps with this. From 3 weeks, make sure you handle and socialise your kittens as much as possible to help them learn to love people. If possible, introduce them to friends, family, males/females/children and also other cats (if kittens and other cats are healthy and if the foster kittens have been with you for 14+ days with no signs of illness) but always make sure they're in a controlled environment and are being closely supervised by you.

Allow the kitten to explore different rooms, different surfaces (hard floor, carpet, tiles etc). It can also be helpful to get the kitten used to noises such as a vacuum cleaner and TV.

Try to play with toys twice a day as well, from 4 weeks of age and try different toys (eg. wand toys, ping pong balls, tunnel, toy mice etc). If the kitten climbs up your leg, immediately place the kitten back on the ground. It may be cute for a 4 week old kitten but we don't want to teach the kitten bad habits for when they're older. Playing too rough with a kitten can also lead to aggression/biting as an adult. Be sure not to encourage a kitten to bite or swipe at your hand or other body parts, use a toy instead! If the kitten does try to bite/attack you, find a toy and re-direct the kitten onto it.

Bathing/cleaning kittens

Do not give kittens a bath (especially when under 5 weeks of age) unless absolutely necessary. A wet kitten can easily become hypothermic and pass away. If a kitten is dirty, use a hypoallergenic baby wipe to clean the kitten.

When can mum cat get desexed and go up for adoption?

Mum cat can get desexed when her milk has dried up and the kittens are no longer feeding from her for a week or two. (Kemps Creek Carers) Mum can either get desexed at the same time as the kittens or before them. She can either get desexed and then go back to your home and be available for adoption, or she can return to the shelter for adoption, with the kittens (arrange with Foster Care Mentor).