

# What to Expect when your foster Cat is Expecting



Cats are pregnant for approximately 58-67 days, or about two months. By the end of the first month, the heartbeats can be detected and during the second month is when most of the development starts to happen. Sometimes, we will get an ultrasound done at a local vet to try and verify pregnancy or to verify how far along the animal is, but this is usually only done in situations where we are worried about the health of the animal. For the most part, in the fostering world, we are giving our best guess on how far along these animals are.

Throughout the time that you have a pregnant foster, it'll mostly be like having any other adult cat foster, except for a few precautions you will need to take.

## When you get them home...



You will want to make sure that your pregnant cat has a space all to her own, where other animals can't come into the room or bother them. It's important that your mom cat will feel as secure as possible in this space. If you are using a spare bedroom, look around and make sure that there are no tight spaces that mom cat can get into, like a box spring. Instinct will make her want to have kittens in a safe den, so make sure that the only dens available are ones of your making.

In her space, you want to make sure that she has a crate setup with some newspapers and blankets and ideally have this crate covered so she will feel safe and protected in the area. You may notice that she will start nesting as she gets closer to going into labor. Make sure that the mom has space outside of her crate to have her things, such as toys and food/water.

It's important to make sure that your momma feels comfortable and not unsafe in her new space. Use the days while you are waiting for her to deliver, to form a bond with her, so that she feels comfortable with you around once her kittens arrive.



## Supplies

Keep in mind, you'll want to make sure that you have some important supplies for your pregnant foster.

- 1.) A safe place for them to have their kittens.
  - 2.) You'll need to have dry and wet **kitten** food on hand for your foster. Being pregnant and then nursing takes a LOT of calories. You'll want to make sure that your foster has constant access to calories.
  - 3.) Towels and blankets. Labor and the days that follow are *messy*. Instinct will make you want to give the mom and her newborns thick fluffy blankets, but most blankets and towels will be completely ruined during the birthing process, it's best to have "disposable" blankets such as fleeces and towels that you can just throw away after.
  - 4.) Floss with no flavoring or string as well as a clean pair of scissors. This is to tie off the umbilical cord later if needed, or to cut the umbilical cord if needed.
  - 5.) A kitchen scale for the days following delivery to track weight.
  - 6.) A hot water bottle incase you need to offer a heat source other than the mother cat.
- A notebook to record anything you may feel needed, such as weights of kittens.

# The Big Day

There's a few signs that your pregnant foster may give you that will let you know that she may be in the beginning stages of labor. Below are some signs that a cat would be entering into labor to watch out for. Remember though, not all cats are the same. Some cats will show none of these symptoms, some will show almost all. Even the most observant foster parent will sometimes be caught totally off guard with their pregnant foster suddenly having kittens.

- 1.) Mammary development in cats starts within a week of delivery!
- 2.) Lack of Appetite day of labor
- 3.) Body temperature dropping to 99 degrees or lower within 24hrs of labor (Normal is around 102 degrees)
- 4.) Your foster cat will begin to exhibit behavior changes. During the final week of the pregnancy, your cat might become reclusive - hiding out as much as possible in a secluded place in the room or she might become extremely affectionate, which happens most if she has a close relationship with one particular caregiver – Cats that become more affectionate will want the caregiver to be right at hand. They might be clingy but also very restless.
- 5.) You might notice your cat licking her genitalia frequently – There is a discharge from the cat's vulva a few hours before birth starts. Your cat's water will break as well. Now is the time for pacing, restlessness, and howling, meowing, or chirping from your foster cat.

Unlike humans, cats generally give birth easily and do not require assistance. Your role is to assist when necessary. Most cats do not want you around while in labor, so be prepared to do what the mom cat wants. Each kitten is born enclosed in its placental membrane, though a "dry birth" is possible, these kittens should be watched carefully for difficulty breathing. In most cases, the mother tears this membrane off, sometimes eating it. If she does not, you will have to remove it, as kittens cannot survive for more than a few minutes before their supply of oxygen runs out.

The mother should also sever the umbilical cord as she cleans her kittens. If she does not, it is up to you to snip the cord and tie it off with some unwaxed dental floss or string. The cord should be tied and cut about 1-2 inches from the kitten. Occasionally, the mother will bite the umbilical too close to the skin of the kitten. If you notice that a kitten is bleeding excessively from it's umbilical, you will want to hold pressure on the umbilical by pinching the cord to help stop the bleeding. You will also need to tie off the umbilical at this point as well. If one kitten is far from the others, you can move the kitten directly back to the mother's stomach area so that it can be kept warm and nurse.





## Possible Complications

Labor isn't pleasant for anyone, and that includes cats. It's uncomfortable and hard work. However, it should not cause your foster extreme pain. If your cat is exhibiting symptoms of extreme discomfort, please call your foster coordinator.

If more than two hours pass in between the delivery of kittens and your foster is experiencing contractions, call your foster coordinator. It is normal for mom cats to take a break between kittens, if she is not distressed, contracting and obviously uncomfortable, don't worry.

Pregnancy can be stressful for your foster as well as for you, but it doesn't have to be. It's important that you try and stay calm and relaxed during the whelping process. Your foster cat may become irritated if you are stressed. In the end, you need to let her be the one in control and you only need to be present in case you are needed, and so that you can regularly switch out any of soiled towels or blankets as you are able to.

If your foster is in labor, you will want to give her space, but make sure that you are present and in close range to help if needed, so don't head to bed or work if it can be helped! Please let your foster coordinator know how many kittens were born, their colors and their sex so that this can all be recorded into our record system, PetPoint.



# Following the birth

You'll want to try and get beginning weights on all of the kittens within the first 24hrs, if the mother cat will allow this. Record their weights in ounces. The first week after birth tends to be the most dangerous for kittens, so you'll want to monitor their weights once a day to make sure that the kittens are gaining. It is not abnormal for their birth weight to be greater than the weight they are on their second day.

You will need to make sure that the blankets are kept dry and clean to the best of your ability. You will also need to make sure that kittens are not getting lost in the blankets. Up until about 3 weeks of age, kittens cannot regulate their body temperature at all. They rely on their environment, siblings and mother to help keep them warm. If you are concerned about the area being too cool, investing in a reptile heatlamp is always a good start to help keep the whelping area warm, just make sure that it's not too hot.

Monitor kittens for having full bellies and that mom is getting enough food herself to keep producing milk for all of the kittens.

For more information on Development in the first few weeks and what to expect in the days going forward, please see the section **Raising your Foster Kittens from Birth to Surgery.**

