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Gestation in Cats

General Information

The term *gestation* means the period when the young are developing in the mother's uterus. In cats, gestation normally lasts 63 to 65 days. Siamese cats may carry their kittens for 67 days.

Diagnosis of Pregnancy

There are currently no accurate blood or urine tests available for early diagnosis of pregnancy in cats. The earliest time of diagnosis may be at 3 to 4 weeks after breeding, when the doctor may be able to detect pregnancy by feeling the abdomen. Abdominal radiographs (x-rays) will usually show evidence of uterine enlargement around 33 to 35 days, and the skeletons of the fetuses are apparent by 45 days. Ultrasound evaluations will usually reveal pregnancy after 30 days.

Physical Changes

During the first 4 to 5 weeks of pregnancy, there are few noticeable changes. Weight gain and enlargement of the abdomen generally become noticeable after the fifth week. The increase, of course, varies with the size of the litter.

The mammary glands may begin to enlarge during the fifth week, but no increase in size is typically noticed until the seventh week. Milk is normally present 1 to 2 days before delivery.

Behavioral Changes

During the last weeks of pregnancy, your cat may have difficulty finding a comfortable position and may seem restless. Many queens (female cats) seek seclusion. Occasionally the cat may soil in the house because the heavy uterus is pressing the bladder or colon.

Exercise

Normally no restriction of exercise is required during the first 6 to 7 weeks. Your cat should be kept indoors during the last 2 weeks because she may attempt to have her kittens in an unsafe outside location.

Nutrition

Good nutrition is essential to the health of both mother and kittens. It is nearly impossible to overfeed a pregnant cat since she requires 2 to 4 times as much food as normal.

Harmful feeding practices include feeding raw egg whites, raw fish, and exclusive meat or fish diets. The doctor may prescribe a special diet or supplementation.

Special dietary recommendations:
