

I found a pregnant cat. What do I do?

Is the cat really pregnant or is it just fat?

- A pregnant cat will carry the weight in her belly slightly more than halfway from her neck to her tail. Her back also will seem to dip some (swayback). The nipples on a pregnant cat also will be darkened.
- A fat cat will carry her weight all over her body.

Is the cat friendly or feral?

- If the cat is **feral**, you can provide it with a safe place to have her kittens. Create a nesting box in a safe, quiet place. Provide her food and water, then observe from a distance. After she has the kittens, she probably will move them to a more private place. Do not interfere with this process but if you can determine where she moves them, you can keep an eye on them and try to socialize the kittens as they grow older. This is important so that you can trap the kittens (and hopefully, the mama cat as well) so that they can be spayed/neutered and vaccinated for rabies.
- If the cat is **friendly** and you can foster it for a while, bring her inside to a safe out-of-the-way location in your house or garage. You will want to keep her isolated from any other animals you have for her and your other animals' safety and health. From there, make a plan.
 1. **Create a nesting box.** The box should be at least 15" x 24" x 5". This can be a box with a hole large enough for mama cat to go in and out of, about 5 inches from the bottom. It also could be a box bottom with sides about 5 inches high. This will allow mama to enter easily without letting the young kittens crawl out until they are a bit older. You can always put another towel or a blanket over half the open box to create a bit of a cave for mama to retreat to when she needs.
 - a. Line the box with newspaper and cover with a towel that you don't mind getting dirty. Change the newspaper and towel once a week.
 - b. Keep the litter box close but not too close to the nesting box. About 2 feet away is a good distance.
 - c. Mama will start keeping more to her box about a week before delivery (cat pregnancies are 9–10 weeks long).
 2. **The following are signs that the cat is about to give birth:** licking of genitalia, discharge from the vulva, her water **breaks**, and behaviors such as increasing pacing and restlessness, howling, meowing and chirping.
 3. **Most cats give birth on their own with no problems.** If you think she is in distress, put her in a **carrier** and take her to a vet.
 - a. Signs of trouble:
 - Flow of blood within 10 minutes before or after the birth of a kitten.
 - No birth after 1 hour of hard straining.
 - Major fatigue and/or lethargy.
 - Labor ceases but the cat is still showing signs of unborn kittens.
 - If there have been more than 3 hours between births.
 - b. Be prepared to help if mama cat does not bite the umbilical cord to break it. You can use dental floss to tie off the cord and cut it.
 - If mama does not lick off the amniotic sac, break the sac and rub the kitten gently but firmly with a clean towel.
 - c. If everything goes well, try to avoid handling kittens the first few days and just let mama cat care for them.



- d. Keep the kittens warm. If you use heating pads, make sure they are covered and do not get so hot they burn the kittens. Most kittens cannot regulate their body temperature until they are about 3 weeks old.
 - e. Most cats give birth to 4–6 kittens but it could be as few as 1 or as many as 9.
 - f. For more information, see <https://www.wikihow.pet/Help-a-Cat-Give-Birth>.
4. **Mama cat can be spayed about 10 days after she has weaned all the kittens.** Kittens generally can be spayed/**neutered** at about 3 months or 3 pounds.
5. **Feeding:** Depending on when you start taking care of mama cat and how close she is to delivery, you will want to ensure she gets a high-protein food such as Royal Canin's Babycat. This also can be used to feed the kittens once mama starts to wean them from her milk. At first, if using dry food, mix the kibble with some water or broth to moisten it. Later, the kittens can start eating the dry food. Tips on kitten care are available here <https://kittenrescue.org/cat-care/>.
 - a. If mama is not nursing the kittens or is not providing enough milk, you will have to bottle feed the kittens. Use either canned or powdered Kitten Milk Replacement (KMR) found at most pet stores and some grocery stores. Here's a video on proper bottle feeding: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXlaoLfEXjY>
 - b. Never give cow's milk to cats, but especially not kittens. They cannot digest it properly.
6. For further tips, see <https://www.medicanimal.com/5-point-Checklist-for-Owners-Expecting-Kittens/a/ART111479> or <https://www.royalcanin.com/us/cats/kitten/helping-your-pregnant-cat-give-birth-at-home>.

What's next?

Now that mama cat has given birth, it's time to determine if you want to keep her and/or the kittens after they are weaned.

1. Consider our Foster Your Own Rescue program (<https://www.animalrescueconnections.org/foster-program>) in which we can guide you through the rehoming process and provide access to low-cost services.
2. If you want to rehome the kittens yourself, please have them spayed/neutered and vaccinated so the breeding cycle does not continue.

