

Notes

for new breeders

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Experienced breeders will tell you that there are a number of things they wish someone had told them before they had their first litter. This article will share a few of those items with you in the hope that it will encourage you to read more and ask more questions.

Planning the First Litter

You have that first show/breeding girl, you have shown and granded her and now are ready for that exciting first litter. Be sure that your girl is mature and ready to be bred. Each breed has different rates of maturity, some breeds are ready at a year, others take up to two years to reach full maturity.

She should be up to date on all vaccines. Vaccinating a pregnant cat is not a good idea and may result in fetal demise, deformities or miscarriage. Wait at least 72 hours after administering vaccines before breeding; if possible, wait a week.

Picking the stud is typically not an easy choice. Surprising as it may be, you can put two GC, NW cats together and get a litter of pet quality kittens. After all, most of us have met some human children who look nothing like their parents. The same thing can happen with cats. Your mentor or breeder of your female should help you look at the pedigree of the potential stud. Are there repeat relatives in his pedigree, or would there be “double-ups” when the pedigree is combined with your female’s? If so, where in the pedigree are they and how often do they occur? Are the parents of the stud living? What other offspring have they produced? What are the qualities of the stud that can complement your female? Ear set? Eye shape and color? Color, pattern, coat texture? What if any, faults have the kittens from this male shown?

Cats have more than one blood type, and if your breed includes cats with multiple blood types, checking the proposed parents’ blood type is an important issue. If the dam and sire have different blood types, and the kitten inherits the sire’s an issue develops called neonatal isoerythrolysis. In this condition

the kitten inherits the dam’s blood type and has antibodies to the sire’s type. The kittens destroy their own blood cells and die. This happens during the first 24 hours of life; during that time frame, the kitten has receptors in its intestines to absorb the queen’s antibodies from her colostrum, providing it with passive immunity to disease. After 24 hours, the receptors no longer permit absorption.

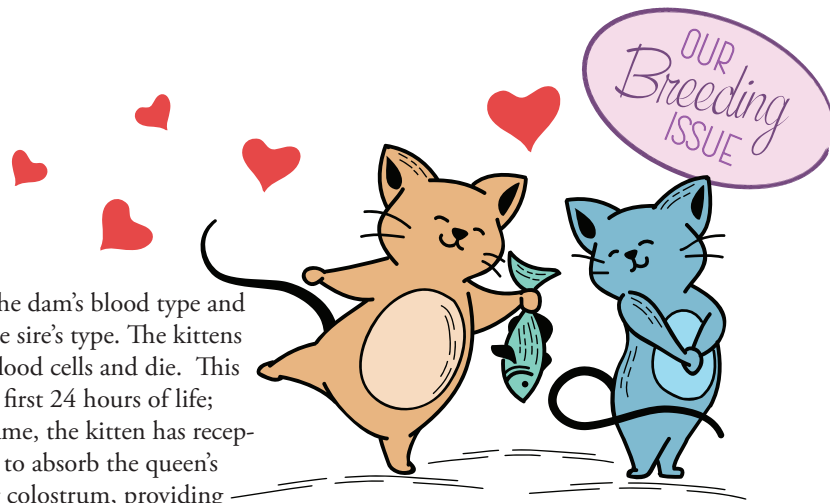
There are two ways to address this situation. By far, the best way is to only breed cats who share the same blood type. However, with some breeds, this may be more of a challenge because of a higher percentage of type B cats (see sidebar). If you do breed incompatible cats, it will be essential to keep the kittens from nursing for the first 24 hours. This can be accomplished by putting a onesie or a surgical suit on the mom, and hand feeding the kittens. After 24 hours it will be safe to allow them to nurse. Being prepared for this possibility and managing it appropriately is part of planning your breeding.

The Logistics of Mating

If you are going to take your queen elsewhere for the stud service, she should have a vet check prior to leaving your house. Please be certain to have a contract for stud service. At a minimum, it should indicate the fee being charged, whether a return kitten is involved, and if so, a clear definition of which kitten (pick of the litter, second pick, pick male, pick female). Many good friendships have been lost over the failure to clearly define the terms in writing.

A female should be with the stud for only a limited time. This allows you to more accurately predict the due date. Most breeders leave the female with the male for 48 hours and/or at least four witnessed matings.

I put my females with the male on the second day of heat, and I remove them at night for sleep, eating and privacy. They return to the male in the morning. I try to witness at least four matings. Contrary to what you may hear, the number of matings does NOT equal the number of kittens. Cats are



Breeds with only Type A blood or an extremely low B frequency:

- American Shorthair
- Bengal
- Maine Coon
- Norwegian Forest

Blood type surveys of various purebred cats have shown that Siamese, Tonkinese, and Oriental Shorthair cats all have type A blood.

Breeds with Intermediate Frequency of Type B (10. 25%)

- Abyssinian
- Birman
- Burmese
- Himalayan
- Persian
- Somali
- Sphynx

Breeds with High Frequency of Type B (more than 25%)

- British Shorthair
- Cornish Rex
- Devon Rex
- Exotic
- Ragdoll
- Turkish Angora
- Turkish Van

Source: International Cat Care Organization All advice from this organization is freely available to everyone. www.icatcare.org.

induced ovulators, meaning that once they have mated, they release the eggs that are mature all at once. Those eggs travel down the fallopian tubes and into the uterus, a fairly slow process. They can be fertilized at any point in those travels. That is why we mate the cat more than once. The cat does not release more eggs with each mating. Female cats are often aggressive right after breeding, you will see the male jump back and get out of the way. The female will also typically roll around after a mating, which helps to get the sperm up into the uterus and fallopian tubes.

Upon her return home, your female should be isolated for a period of time. Each cattery and each home have their own set of resident germs, you don't want her bringing home something to your other cats. You may notice she is licking her vaginal area, or it may be quite red. If this occurs most breeders give a course of antibiotics such as Clavamox. Please discuss this possibility with your vet when she goes for her pre-mating visit.

Ensuring a Healthy Pregnancy

The first sign of pregnancy usually occurs on day 21. The nipples become a brighter pink and are slightly swollen. Breeders say the gal has "pinked up". It is a good idea for you to know what your female's nipples look like prior to breeding, so you have a comparison. You may also notice some vomiting in early pregnancy. Yes, cats get morning sickness too!

Nutrition is very important during pregnancy. In just a little over two months a litter of kittens must go from a single cell to a newborn kitten. The pregnant dam needs a lot of energy and good nutrition for this to successfully occur. Many breeders feed their pregnant dams kitten food due to its high caloric and high protein contents. Whether or not you continue adult food always offer extra food and ensure that the dam is not hungry.

Baby bumps can be deceptive. Some pregnant cats look HUGE and have a small litter, other cats look very small in comparison and have a large litter. So size is not always indicative of the number of kittens growing inside. First-time dams have good muscle tone which makes the growing uterus less obvious. Long slinky breeds hide a big litter quite successfully.

During pregnancy you might observe a clear vaginal discharge. This is normal. You should be concerned if the discharge is milky, or greenish, blood tinged or has a foul odor. This does not necessarily mean that there is a problem with the pregnancy but does mean there is a vaginal issue occurring. Most vet will advise a course of Clavamox. Do be certain your vet agrees with giving any medication during pregnancy.

As the pregnancy progresses and the pregnant belly gets larger and nipples get bigger, do pay attention to the edge of the litter pan. I wipe mine with a disinfectant daily so that the belly, and nipples are dragging on as clean a surface as possible.

Pregnancy can last from 61-72 days, with most cats having their kittens in the 63-67 day range. Your breeder should be able to tell you what is normal for the line of cats you are working with. For example, most of my cats deliver on day 67. Toward the end

of pregnancy, during the last two weeks, pregnant cats should be confined to the area where you would like kittens to be born. In my cattery it is a cage with a large nest box in it.

Cats that have been your pampered pet now need to transition to their new role, that of being a mom. You can assist them by separating them from the other cats, caging or confining. Cats that have not been conditioned to their new role will move kittens constantly, trying to bring them into bed with you. Kittens have been lost in a sofa cushion, left under furniture and become fatally chilled at night while mom was snuggled in bed with her human. Help your mom to learn her new role and be successful at raising her kittens.

Our next article will discuss late pregnancy, labor, delivery and those first days of raising kittens.

Titles Found in a Pedigree

CH (Champion): Indicates six judges have said the non-altered cat has no disqualifying faults

PR (Premier): Indicates six judges have said the altered cat has no disqualifying faults

GC (Grand Champion): Indicates that cat has defeated 200 other champions

GP (Grand Premier): Indicates that the cat has defeated 75 other premiers

DM (Distinguished Merit): Indicates, if female the cat has produced 5 grand champions or grand premiers, if male, has produced 15 grand champions or grand premiers

RW (Regional Winner): Indicates that in the cat's region of residence they have scored in the top 25 cats for that show season

NW (National Winner): Indicates that the cat has scored in the top 25 of all cats, in their classification, nationally

New Titles Which Will Soon Appear In Pedigrees

Bronze Champion or Premier (CHB/PRB) – defeated 50 champions/20 premiers

Silver Champion or Premier (CHS/PRS) – defeated 100 champions/40 premiers

Gold Champion or Premier (CHG/PRG) – defeated 150 champions/60 premiers