



Feline Cesarean Section – Post-Operative Instructions

A Cesarean section or C-section is major surgery to remove kittens from the uterus of the mother cat. Most cats recover quickly from this procedure; however, if your cat was in labor for several hours before surgery was performed, her recovery will be slower and she will need extra attention and help with her litter.

What should be done for the mother after she gives birth?

Care during the immediate post-operative period and care of the mother:

The mother has been given an anesthetic that is eliminated from her body quickly. Most cats are raising their heads by the time they arrive home. Complete recovery from anesthesia may take two to six hours, depending on her physical condition at the time of surgery and her age.

During the recovery period, she must be restrained in such a way that she does not fall and hurt herself or roll over and crush the kittens. The kittens should not be left alone with her until she is completely awake and coordinated.

The mother should be interested in eating within a few hours after she is completely awake. Allow her to eat and drink all that she wants, being careful that she does not eat too much and vomit. Her food intake at this time should be about 1.5 times her food intake before she became pregnant. By the time of the third or fourth week of nursing, her food intake may be 2 to 2.5 times normal. She should be fed a premium brand high-quality pregnant cat formula or kitten food during the period of nursing in order to supplement her calcium intake.



The mother's temperature may rise 1-2°F (0.5° - 1°C) above normal for the first one to three days, then it should return to the normal range. The normal range is 100°-102°F (37.8°-38.9°C). A CAT SHOULD NEVER BE GIVEN ACETAMINOPHEN (TYLENOL®). If the mother's temperature goes above 104°F (40°C), she and her litter should be examined by a veterinarian for the presence of serious complications.

Postpartum management of the mother:

A bloody vaginal discharge is normal for up to a week following delivery of the kittens. It may be quite heavy for the first one to three days, and then should begin to diminish. If it continues for longer than one week, the mother should be checked for the presence of infection. Also, if the discharge changes color or develops an odor, she should be examined by a veterinarian.

If she was spayed at the time of the surgery, there should be no vaginal discharge.

The stitches may or may not need to be removed, depending on the type of suture material used. As a general rule, if the stitches are visible, they will have to be removed. Suture removal should occur at ten to fourteen days after surgery.

What should be done for the kittens?

The newborn kittens

The kittens should be ready to nurse as soon as you arrive home. The mother may not be awake or alert enough to handle nursing alone; therefore you may have to assist the process by making her lie still so the kittens can nurse.

Kittens should sleep or be nursing 90% of the time. If they are crying or whining, something is usually wrong. Uterine infections, inadequate milk production, and poor-quality or infected milk are the most common causes. The entire litter can die within twenty-four hours if one of these occurs. The kittens and the mother should be examined by a veterinarian if you are uncertain about their health.

If the mother does not have any milk at first, you may supplement the kittens for the first day or two. There are several good commercial feline milk replacers available. Nursing bottles are available, made in the appropriate size for tiny mouths. The following formula may be used for a day or two if the other products are not available:



1 cup milk + 1 tablespoon corn oil + 1 pinch of salt + 3 egg yolks (no whites). Blend together until uniform. It should be fed at the rate of 1 oz (30 cc or 30 ml) per 1/4 lb. (1/8 kg) of kitten weight PER 24 HOURS. That amount should be divided into 3-5 feedings. The average newborn kitten weighs 1/4 lb. (1/8 kg) at birth.

Another alternative is pasteurized or canned goat's milk, which is available in most grocery stores. It should be fed at the above amounts.

Although we prefer that kittens begin nursing immediately, a healthy newborn can survive for up to twelve hours without nursing. However, if the newborn is weak, dehydrated, or chilled, nourishment must be given very soon.

Environmental temperature control

A newborn kitten is not able to regulate its body temperature well. As long as the kittens stay near their mother, the room temperature is not too critical. However, if they are not with their mother, the room temperature should be between 85° and 90°F (29.4° and 32.2°C). If the litter is kept outside, chilling (hypothermia) or overheating (hyperthermia) is more likely to occur. The newborns should be kept inside the house or garage if possible.

What should be done for the older kitten?

Weaning the kittens

Weaning should begin when the kittens are about 3 ½ weeks old. The first step toward weaning is to place a 50:50 mixture of water and cow's milk or milk replacer in a flat saucer. The kittens' noses should be dipped in this mixture two to three times per day until they begin to lap. Once lapping begins, canned kitten food should be crumbled in the water: milk mixture. As they begin to eat the solid food, the water: milk mixture should be reduced until they are eating only the solid food. Once they are eating solid food, usually six weeks of age, they may be placed in their new home.

Early health care for the kittens

Kittens can be treated for intestinal parasites (worms) when they are three and six weeks of age. It is important that accurate weights are obtained for the kittens so that the proper dose of medication can be used.

First vaccinations typically begin at six to eight weeks of age. If your kittens were not able to nurse during the first three days of life, they will not have received proper immunity from their mother. In this situation, vaccinations should begin about two to four weeks of age. Your veterinarian will discuss the special needs of hand-raised kittens.

If care is needed after hours, please call South Carolina Veterinary Emergency Care at (803) 798-3837

ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS: