

PREGNANCY DIAGNOSIS



Once the queen has been bred, the breeder is often anxious to know whether she is pregnant. There are traditional means of pregnancy detection in the queen. The failure of a queen to come back into heat after breeding is one of the most obvious signs of pregnancy, but a pseudopregnancy will produce the same effect. However, queens experiencing a pseudopregnancy will not usually return to heat until 50 to 60 days after the last estrus.

The behavior of some queens may change during pregnancy. Those that are typically distant may become very affectionate, and vice versa, although this phenomenon is inconsistent. The queen will continuously gain weight during pregnancy. Without precise weighing however, it will be difficult to distinguish any change until week three or four.

Traditionally, there has been no blood test available in the cat to detect pregnancy. Cats

do not produce a placental hormone such as human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG), which is the basis for some human pregnancy tests. However, the hormone relaxin is produced primarily by the placenta and is a useful indicator for pregnancy. Relaxin levels increase in pregnancy, but not in pseudopregnancy. A sudden drop in blood relaxin levels could indicate that spontaneous abortion has occurred.

An in-clinic test kit has been developed as a rapid means of pregnancy detection for cats. The test requires a small volume of plasma and results are available in about 10 minutes. Relaxin testing is most reliable when performed no sooner than 25 days after mating, although pregnancy in some queens might be detected earlier. False positive results have been reported in queens with ovarian cysts.

PRACTICAL NOTE

Other methods of diagnosing pregnancy are based on data from clinical, x-ray, and ultrasound examinations.

• CLINICAL EXAMINATION

Bilateral enlargement of the abdomen is apparent around the 30th day. Generally, the fetuses can be detected through abdominal palpation starting around the third week. Experienced veterinarians are usually able to feel small bumps in the uterus by day 25 after breeding. After day 35, they are no longer easy to palpate.

• ABDOMINAL X-RAY EXAMINATION

Pregnancy can be detected with x-rays approximately five weeks after breeding. The skeletons of the fetuses are visible around the 36th day and become obvious after the 45th day.

• ULTRASOUND EXAMINATION

The diagnosis can be made starting on the 20th day. Fetal movements appear on the 28th day.

