

Care and Management of Pregnant Farm and Companion Animals

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ABSTRACT

Pregnancy is an important period in the life of an animal. The care given during this time affects both the health of the mother and the development of the unborn young one. Proper feeding, clean water, comfortable housing, regular health care and gentle handling can help reduce problems during pregnancy and delivery. Cows, buffaloes, sheep, goats, pigs, horses, dogs and cats all need special attention during pregnancy, although their requirements are different. The need for good nutrition becomes greater during the later stages of pregnancy because the young one grows rapidly during this period. Animals carrying twins or triplets need still more care. Regular observation also helps the owner notice problems such as loss of appetite, weakness, abnormal discharge or difficult labour at an early stage. Simple and timely management can help improve the chances of a normal delivery and a healthy newborn.

INTRODUCTION:

Pregnancy is a very important stage in animal production. For a farmer, a successful pregnancy means another healthy calf, lamb, kid or piglet, while for pet owners it means healthy puppies or kittens. However, pregnancy should not be considered a period when the animal can simply be left alone. The mother needs proper food, clean water, a safe place to stay and regular observation.

The length of pregnancy varies between animals. It is approximately 280 days in cows, 310–320 days in buffaloes, about 150 days in sheep and goats, 114 days in pigs, around 11 months in horses, and about 63–65 days in dogs and cats. Keeping a record of mating or breeding dates helps the owner estimate the expected date of delivery and prepare for it.

The most important principle is simple: a pregnant animal needs good nutrition, comfortable housing, careful handling and timely veterinary care.

Care and Management During Pregnancy

Give Good-Quality Feed

Good feeding is one of the most important parts of pregnancy management. Pregnant animals should receive good-quality green fodder, dry fodder and concentrate according to their species, body condition and stage of pregnancy. A suitable mineral mixture should also be provided when needed.

During the last part of pregnancy, the growing fetus needs more nutrients. Therefore, the diet should be improved gradually rather than suddenly. In cows and buffaloes, good nutrition during late pregnancy also helps the animal prepare for the next lactation.

Sheep and goats need special attention during the last few weeks, particularly when they are

carrying twins or triplets. Their energy requirement increases considerably, and poor feeding can lead to pregnancy toxemia (Merck Veterinary Manual, 2026).

Pregnant sows should receive enough feed to maintain good body condition. Both severe underfeeding and excessive feeding should be avoided.

Always Provide Clean Water

Fresh and clean water should be available throughout pregnancy. Water requirement increases during hot weather and in late pregnancy. Drinking containers should be cleaned regularly.

A simple way to check water availability is to make sure that the animal never has to wait for drinking water, particularly during the hottest part of the day.

Provide a Clean and Safe Place

The housing area should be clean, dry, well-ventilated and comfortable. A slippery floor is dangerous because a fall can injure the mother and may put the pregnancy at risk.

As delivery approaches, cattle and buffaloes should preferably be moved to a clean calving area. Sheep and goats need dry shelter, particularly during cold or rainy weather. A clean and comfortable farrowing area should be prepared for sows.

Pregnant mares should have enough space to move comfortably. Healthy mares generally benefit from regular, moderate exercise, unless a veterinarian advises otherwise (Merck Veterinary Manual, 2024).

Dogs and cats should be provided with a quiet and familiar place, especially during the final days of pregnancy.

Avoid Unnecessary Stress

Pregnant animals should be handled calmly. Excessive running, beating, overcrowding, fighting and unnecessary transportation should be avoided, especially during late pregnancy.

Cows and buffaloes should be protected from fighting with other animals. Sheep and goats should not be overcrowded. Pregnant mares should preferably be kept with animals that they are comfortable with.

Dogs and cats may become restless as delivery approaches. A quiet environment helps them feel secure and allows them to prepare for giving birth naturally.

Keep a Watch on the Animal's Health

A pregnant animal should be observed every day. Farmers should look for changes in appetite, behaviour and movement. Signs such as severe weakness, fever, bleeding, foul-smelling discharge, difficulty walking or sudden loss of appetite should not be ignored.

Vaccination and deworming should be done according to the local veterinary programme and the animal's stage of pregnancy. Before giving any medicine, farmers should consult a veterinarian because some medicines may not be suitable during pregnancy.

Pregnancy diagnosis is also useful because it confirms whether the animal is pregnant and helps the farmer plan feeding and management. In sheep and goats, identifying animals carrying twins or triplets can be particularly helpful for providing extra nutrition.

Species-Wise Care

Animal Important care during pregnancy

Cow Provide balanced feed, minerals and clean water. Avoid slipping and fighting. Prepare a clean calving area before delivery.

Animal Important care during pregnancy

Buffalo Give good-quality feed, especially during late pregnancy. Protect from heat and provide plenty of clean water.

Sheep Improve feeding during late pregnancy, especially for animals carrying twins or triplets. Provide dry shelter and avoid overcrowding.

Goat Give adequate energy during the final weeks. Avoid sudden changes in feed and watch for weakness or poor appetite.

Pig Maintain good body condition with a balanced gestation diet. Avoid both underfeeding and overfeeding. Prepare a clean farrowing area.

Horse Provide good-quality forage and a balanced diet. Allow suitable exercise and increase feed gradually during late pregnancy.

Dog Provide a complete balanced diet, clean water and a quiet environment. Monitor appetite and behaviour as delivery approaches.

Cat Provide a good-quality pregnancy diet, clean water and a quiet place for delivery. Avoid unnecessary supplements.

Special Care Before Delivery

The final few days require closer observation. The animal may show signs that delivery is approaching, such as restlessness, changes in appetite, udder development or swelling around the vulva. These signs are not exactly the same in every species.

The delivery area should be cleaned and prepared in advance. Dry bedding should be provided where appropriate. The mother should be allowed to give birth without unnecessary disturbance.

Farmers should avoid repeated internal examinations or forceful pulling of the fetus without proper knowledge. If the animal has strong labour but the fetus is not being delivered, or if the mother becomes weak, distressed or severely exhausted, a veterinarian should be contacted immediately. Early

assistance can save both the mother and the newborn.

CONCLUSION

Taking care of a pregnant animal does not always require complicated methods. The most important things are good feed, clean water, safe housing, gentle handling and regular observation. Extra care is needed during the last few weeks because the unborn young one grows rapidly and the nutritional needs of the mother increase.

Although cows, buffaloes, sheep, goats, pigs, horses, dogs and cats have different pregnancy requirements, the basic approach remains the same. Keep the animal comfortable, provide a balanced diet, avoid unnecessary stress and watch for anything unusual.

For farmers and animal owners, one simple message is worth remembering: a healthy mother is the first step towards a healthy newborn. When a pregnancy does not progress

normally or labour is prolonged, timely veterinary attention is essential.

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