

Baby, it's time! Parturition

Parturition is the medical term for giving birth. It involves three stages: dilation, delivery, and expulsion of placenta. Most ewes and does complete all three stages without the need for intervention.

1 - Dilation

Cervical dilation is the progressive softening and opening of the cervix to allow passage of the babies. It typically takes 3 to 6 hours but may be quicker in older females. Failure of the cervix to dilate is called ringwomb. It is a common cause of dystocia in sheep and goats and can be difficult to manage. A caesarian section is usually necessary. Manual dilation of the cervix may work in cases of incomplete cervical dilation.



2 - Delivery

Delivery of the offspring occurs when the amniotic sac (water bag) breaks, and the ewe or doe begins pushing. This stage does not usually last longer than 2 hours. Females may need assistance if they do not make progress 45 to 60 minutes after appearance of the water bag. Lack of progress may indicate malpresentation or an oversized fetus. Normal presentation is the head and both front legs: the “diving position.”



3 - Expulsion of placenta

After the offspring are born, the female will expel the placenta (fetal membranes, afterbirth). This usually occurs within a few hours of delivery but may take longer.

Placenta is considered retained if it is not expelled after 12 to 18 hours. Treatment is usually antibiotics to prevent infection. While gentle traction is okay, you should never forcibly remove the placenta.