

What is gestation?

Nearly all mammals are viviparous. This means that they give birth to live young, rather than laying eggs. The time between the fertilisation of the egg cell and the birth of the offspring is called the **gestation period**. The gestation period of humans is 266 days, 8 days short of nine months.

The length of gestation varies from species to species. The shortest known gestation is that of the Virginian opossum, about 12 days, and the longest that of the Indian elephant, about 22 months. In the course of evolution the duration of gestation has become adapted to the needs of the species. The gestation periods of other animals reveals that the length of the gestation period is largely a matter of the animal species size. Exceptions are the guinea pig and related South American **rodents**, in which gestation is prolonged (averaging 68 days for the guinea pig and 111 days for the chinchilla). Another factor is that, in many species with restricted **breeding** seasons, gestation is adjusted so that birth matches with the period when food is most **abundant**. Therefore the horse, a spring breeder with 11 months' gestation, has its young the following spring, as does the sheep, a **fall breeder** with a five months' gestation. Animals that live in the open tend to have longer gestations.

Rank	Mammal	Days
1	Hamster	16-23
2	Mouse	19
3	Mouse (meadow)	21
4	Rat	21-23
5	Gerbil	22-26
6	Wombat	26-28
7	Muskrat	28-30
8	Rabbit (domestic)	28-35
9	Squirrel (gray)	30-40
10	Chipmunk	31

Camels	Camels are known for their stubborn and crabbish personalities, but consider this: camels have a gestation period of 13 to 15 months. The month in which conception occurred can shift the birthdate, with November conceptions pushing the birth 18 days longer than a May conception. Other camelids, such as llamas, also have a long gestation period — about 330 days.
Giraffes	Giraffes have gestation periods anywhere from 400 to 460 days. Despite being the tallest land animal in the world, the mother gives birth standing up — so the baby needs to be big enough to brace for a long fall. With lions and other predators abound, the world is a dangerous place for baby giraffes when they first come into the world — part of the reason for the long delay.
Whale and dolphins	Whales and dolphins, also known as cetaceans, are known for their high intelligence, complex societies, and peaceful personalities — so it's no surprise that they also take a lot of care in developing their young. Although all species have different gestation periods, orcas have the longest period among dolphins at about 17 months. Some sperm whales — the largest living predators — have been known to carry their young for up to 19 months.
Walruses	Walruses have the longest gestation period of all pinnipeds (a group of mammals that includes seals and sea lions), carrying their young for as long as 15 to 16 months. Seal and sea lion mothers don't get off easy and carry their offspring for about 330 and 350 days, respectively. Walruses also have the lowest reproductive rate of any pinniped.

flatworm		10 days
jellyfish		2 – 3 days
worm		2 – 4 weeks
ladybird		4 – 7 weeks
spider		common spiders – 7 days recluse brown spiders – 30 days
starfish		28 – 30 days
centipede		1 - 3 months
snail		2 – 4 weeks
lobster		9 – 12 months