

Normal Goat Health Information

- Temperature = 102.5 - 104 - This varies depending on the temperature of the goat's surroundings.
- Pulse rate = 70 - 80 beats per minute
- Respiration = 15 to 30 per minute
- Rumen (stomach) movements = 1 - 1.5 per minute
- Puberty = 7 weeks - 8 months (separate bucks from does at 2 months)
- Estrus/Heat Cycle = 17 to 23 days
- Gestation = 143 to 155 days
- Life span:
 - Does = 11-12 years average age, but... usually the death in does is kidding related. Does that are "retired" from breeding around age 10 live longer: 16-18 years (and I just recently found a doe who was 24; she was retired from kidding at age 10).
 - Wethers = 11-16 years average age
 - Bucks = 8-10 average age - bucks usually live shorter lives than does and wethers due to the stresses of going into rut each year.

Full growth size: Most goats do not reach their full size until they are about three years of age. (They keep growing for about three years)

Goat Behavior, Characteristics & FYI

Goats are extremely intelligent and curious. Goats are very often not given credit for being the smart and loving creatures they actually are. Goats are goats, and they think and act like goats, and no other animal, but if you are unfamiliar with goats and how they think, you could think of goats brains as working kind of like a dogs, except they don't have the "I must please humans" thing that dogs have.

Kids:

Bottle Raised Kids:

Kids learn from their mothers, other adults in the herd and from older kids. Bottle fed kids who are not raised with the herd will not learn to eat grain, hay or browse as quickly as herd raised kids (even if the herd raised kids are bottle fed). They will not learn to drink water as quickly either. Since they have no older goats to learn from, and they get a bottle whenever they are hungry, they will not want to try new things to eat. If you get pizza all the time, why try broccoli? Bottle fed kids will not really start trying new foods unless you cut back on the bottle and offer these new foods.

Do not bottle feed water; it is counter productive. This does not teach kids to drink water. If you fill their belly up with water from a bottle, they have no reason to try nibbling on new foods or drinking water out of a bucket.

We let all kids, even bottle fed ones, live with the herd from day one; we never bring them in the house to live. The only kids brought in the house are kids that are so weak they must be tube fed. If a mother rejects one kid and we have to bottle feed him, he still is left to live with his sibling and mother. If the kid is orphaned, he is put with kids his own age. Bottle fed kids will bond and grow up with their like aged herd mates. They learn avoid the bigger goats and also to browse and be goats from the herd.

Poops:

The first few poops a kid will have are like black tar. Then, after the kids start nursing the poops become yellow, sometimes this is quite sticky. The mother may, or may not, keep her kid's butt clean. You need to make sure the poop is cleaned off, especially, since it can dry on their butts and actually clog them up so they are poops anymore. The poops will stay yellow until the kid start eating solid food. As they start eating solid food, the poops become brown.

Hiding & Getting Lost:

Baby goats are very good at getting themselves lost. They instinctually crawl into little hidey holes and will lay very quiet. This is natural. They love "caves" and holes and will surprise you how well they can hide. Don't expect the mother to find the kids either. You would think the mother would not lose her kids, or at least be able to find her kids. Over the years, we have found this is not always the case. The mother wanders off, grazing, and will have no idea where the kid is hiding. We have "lost" many a kid, to be found after hours of search in a brush pile or under some large object. Only once did we lose a kid over night, and we found her 24 hours later walking next to her mother. We have no idea where she disappeared to. Both of us searched the entire property four times (and we have gotten pretty good at finding kids over the years). It is a good idea to put very brightly colored collars on young kid to help make them easier to find. Also, when looking for a kid, keep in mind that they can squeeze into very small places (the smaller the better as far as they are concerned).

Chewing:

Kids (like adult goats) "explore their world" with their mouths just like human babies do; they have to use their mouths because they have no hands. They "chew" and "mouth" things to "explore" and learn.

Climbing:

Climbing is fun and games to goats. Mother goats let their babies jump and climb on them. No other adult goat in a herd will let a baby climb on them. This means, baby goats climb on "family" and if you let them climb on you, you are considered family (a good thing). To a goat, climbing is fun, fun, fun and their way of playing.

A toy to a goat is something that can be climbed on.

Possible Goat Toys:

- big cable spools from the electric company
- a pile of logs
- fallen trees
- stacked cinder blocks
- a picnic table
- plastic play forts
- you

Sneezing:

Did you know that goats use the sneeze sound as an alarm? They use a sneeze to warn each other of danger (be it actually real or imagined). Young goats sneeze as part of their play. If you watch your goats you will begin to notice their use of the sneeze sound.

Head Butting and Head Pushing:

Head butting in young goats is play: play, as part of practice to become an adult (like all child play is). If you push a kid's head, they will push back in play. Never push on a goat's forehead. You do not want to encourage this because you do not want a mature goat to want to play with you in this manner, because someone (like you) could get hurt.



Goats LOVE to climb - that is goat fun.

Goats have no fear of heights and will scare you to death on occasion, if they get the chance. Our goats loved to walk out on this fallen/hung-up tree. Because of the nature of our steep land, the goat would be 4 stories up when they got way out there. It would be tricky turning around to come back down when another goat would be pushing on you.

Needless to say, We got this tree down as soon as we could.

Adults - both male & female

Violence & Herd Order

No matter how sweet and loving you goat may be with you, they will on occasion get violent with their herdmates. This is the natural ways of things, and no matter how you want them to always get along, there will be occasions where your goats fight and take "pot shots" at each other. A goat herd has a "pecking order"; every goat has there place in the herd. When you add new goats to a herd, they may get beat up by members of the established herd until the new goat's place in the herd is established. There is no way to stop the fighting, separating them won't help, because when you let them back together again, they will start the fighting again. Just let it run it's course.

Goats will ram "lesser" goats for no other reason than to just to make sure they know their place. Goats can, and do, get hurt when they get rammed. This is one reason never to use "key hole" feeders. With these types of feeder, a goat can't see when they are about to get hit, and they cannot remove their head fast enough to avoid getting hit, and because of this they can get injured.

On occasion goats/kids can even get morally injured from being rammed by another goat. I have known of kids getting spinal injuries and even older does getting broken ribs (in these cases the goats died from their injuries). These cases were all in herds where the none of the goats had horns. Just imagine what could happen if the goat did have horns; this is another argument for not having horns. Because goats will ram each other.

Sometimes, when a goat exhibits signs of illness like they may have been poisoned, they actually have gotten internal injuries from being rammed by a herdmate.

How can I tell if my goat is fat?

The first question is, are your goats really fat, or just in good condition? Goats are tricky because what looks fat to us is just a healthy goat. We call it "good condition".

If you look at their belly, or width side to side, and this is really big or wide, that is not fat. That is good rumen development and a sign of a healthy goat. A goat's rumen is a big fermentation vat, and the bigger it is the better they process their food. A big rumen is a good thing.



Pygmies goats very often look "fat" when they are not because of their short and stout body structure.

In this photo "Max" is not fat or pregnant; she is lactating and in "good condition".

To really judge if a goat is fat, you need to feel the base of the tail (where the tail meets the body). If it is "pudgy" here, the goat is "pudgy". You can also feel their brisket; their front chest. If this area is soft and feels like it has a little extra padding, then your goat also is carrying a little extra padding. We say of our goats that are a little

overweight: they are in "very good condition".

Goats that are "producing"; i.e. that are pregnant, lactating, and breeding, need more food than goats that are not; i.e. wethers and unbred does. It is the non-producers that you really need to watch because they require so little grain that they can get fat. A non-producer, if they are getting hay and browse each day probably only needs one CUP of grain a day.

Sneezing that is nothing to worry about:

Did you know that goats use the sneeze sound as an alarm? They use a sneeze to warn each other of danger (be it actually real or imagined). Young goats sneeze as part of their play. If you watch your goats you will begin to notice their use of the sneeze sound.

Goats sneeze sometimes when you give them alfalfa hay. Who knows why? It's just their way of saying "I like alfalfa!"

Getting goats to move; do not push

Goats do not push well. If you push them to get them out of your way, they will lean into the push. If you want them to move, pull them. Give your goat a collar; this will be their "handle". Goats can also be trained to walk on a leash.

Petting Goats

Goats like to be petted, but don't just pet them like you would a dog. Goats like their front chest and underarms scratched. They often, before they get to know and trust you, do not like for you to pet the top of their head; this is because goats have eyes that can see practically 360 degrees around themselves (even behind them) but they can not see above them very well. When you come at them with your hand from "above" like you are going to pet the top of their head, they cannot see what you are doing and it makes them nervous. Come at them with your hand from the front and from the side. This way they can see what you are doing- you are just going to pet them. Pet their neck, back and chest instead of the head (as you would a dog). Many goats do like having their head scratched once they know you are just petting them and not going to do anything "funny".

Head Butting and Head Pushing:

Older goats head butt to play, but more often to fight. They will fight between themselves to establish dominance and they will take "pot-shots" at smaller goats to show them who is boss. There is really nothing you can do to get them not to do this - it's what goats do.

Adult females (and sometimes wethers/neutered males)

Fighting

Fighting is how goats determine their place/status in the herd.

When bring new goats into a herd, there may be some fighting. The best thing to just let the fight happen because this is the way of the goat and the goat herd.

It is actually very common for a doe that has recently kidded (or sometimes right before she kids) will try to "upgrade" her status/dominance in the herd in order to secure a higher status for her kids. There is nothing you can do to stop a fight such as this. Trying to keep does that want to fight apart will only prolong the inevitable, because they will pick up the fighting whenever they get their next chance. The best thing to do is let them duke it out. It's brutal, but it is the way of goats. It is their nature.

You may also see other goats get involved, and take sides in a fight. There is nothing you can do about this either. This is a gamble on the "helper" goat's part in hopes they will be the friend and helper of the winner, thus helping their own status a bit (but not as much as actually fighting a fight).

Once a winner is decided and status amongst the herd is clarified, they will not fight anymore.

Smell

Does and wethers (neutered males) do not develop a smell like bucks do. It is bucks and their smell that have given all goats a "bad rap" for smelling. If you keep your buck with your does (not recommended) the buck smell will get on the does, and if you milk the does, it can get in their milk.

Dominance

A goat herd is very hierarchical. Every doe has a place in the herd. There are various way a doe may show her dominance over another doe.

- Hitting/ramming
- Making her get up from where she is resting
- Tongue flapping
- Leg pawing
- Blubbering

Heat

When a doe is in heat, she may exhibit some "bucky characteristics". Other does who are not in heat may also exhibit these characteristics toward the doe who is in heat.

- Tongue flapping
- Leg pawing
- Blubbering

Squatting & Back Arching:

Question:

Ever since we bred one of our young does has been doing this weird squatting thing. She squats like she is going to pee, but then she tucks/curles her bottom in, her front and back legs are very close.... she kind of turns into a ball. It's like she is trying to push/squeeze something out, but nothing comes out! I have seen it 5 or 6 times, and it's getting very troubling. She has no discharge or blood, but I wonder if she's aborting or having an abnormal pregnancy.

Answer:

Your doe is having what we refer to as a "girl boner", for lack of a better term. It looks totally involuntary - like she has no control over what is happening.. right?

The act you describe is what a doe does when she "comes" when a buck breeds her. It happens right when the buck has a successful thrust and meets his mark. You want to see arched back at breeding; it means a good solid "poke" that satisfied everyone. She is not trying to squeeze out the semen; it really means the semen is on it's way.

We have seen our does have "girl boners" many, many times over the years. We can't really explain the whys and wherefores for it, but we do know, at least in the cases of this that we have seen in our own herd, it is absolutely nothing to worry about.

Mother Goats

Pawing:

Some new mothers will paw and paw at her new kids. She is doing this to get them up, moving and nursing. She is not attacking her kid, or intentionally trying to hurt them. Some new moms are worse than others about this and it's frustrating because you don't want the mom to accidentally kill her kid. We never have had, even the most enthusiastic of mothers, kill their kid.

Pawing is not a sign of a mother refusing her kid. If she refuses a kid, she will ignore it, or butt at it with her head in an effort to get it to leave her alone.

Adult males

Courting/Mating

Bucks have their own special way of getting the ladies in the mood. Along with their smell and peeing habits they also have some certain behaviors that may seem odd, especially if you have never seen it before. These mannerisms are most often exhibited toward the doe in heat, but because breeding and dominance can be so closely related, you will also see does and wethers, as well as bucks asserting their dominance over each other (or you) by exhibiting these traits. Also, does in heat will exhibit these traits and we call this "acting bucky".

These mannerisms are totally normal and the buck may try them on you as well as a doe. When a buck is "in the mood" he doesn't always care what sex or species he tries to breed. If a buck exhibits these traits at you, he may have a crush on you and you should be careful that he doesn't try to mount you when you aren't looking.

- **Tongue flapping**- The buck will lower his head and flap his tongue at the side of the doe (or you).
- **Leg pawing** - The buck paws at the side of the doe with a straightened leg. This is usually done at the same time as tongue flapping.
- **Blubbering**- This is done toward the doe (or you); it can be done in conjunction with leg pawing and tongue flapping

Smell

As bucks grow they will develop a distinctive odor. Many people find it a bad smell, others don't find it that bad, they just find it strong. The odor will not be quite so bad the first year, but will increase with maturity. Does and wethers (neutered males) do not develop a smell like bucks do. It is bucks and their smell that have given all goats a "bad rap" for smelling. If you keep your buck with your does (not recommended) the buck smell will get on the does, and if you milk the does, it can get in their milk.

Urinating

As bucks mature and go into rut, the male equivalent of heat (in the Fall), they will start peeing on their front legs and faces. They have a kind of "spray attachment" on the penis and can really spray. He will spray his urine into his mouth and then curl up his lip to get a good whiff. His legs, face and beard will eventually be coated with a sticky layer of urine (irresistible to a doe). Once rut is over (in the Winter) he may, or may not, stop peeing on himself.

Aggression

As a buck matures, he will get more aggressive. This is natural. Even the sweetest, most well behaved buck may challenge you, as well as his companions, from time to time (usually during breeding season). Aggressive bucks toward humans is not good. A buck he needs to know/be taught that you are dominant to him.

Other habits

As he goes into rut, your buck will want to make sure all his equipment is in proper working order, so he will be ready at a moment's notice to breed a doe. He will get erections quite often. He will check himself with his mouth (yes, he will be able to reach).

A buck will practice his sexual technique on his male companions. He may also try to practice on you if you are not careful. He may not intend to hurt you, but you should be very careful when you are around a buck in rut.