

POLAR BEARS AND THEIR CUBS

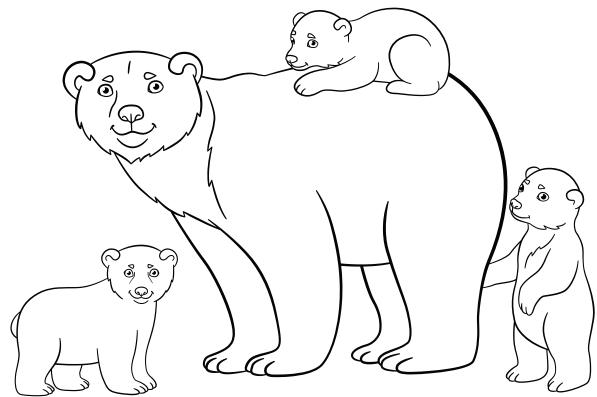
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Polar bears give birth to a litter of babies called cubs. A mother will generally have twins but sometimes just one cub is born. Occasionally a litter will have three.

Female polar bears generally only mate every three years but in areas where food is plentiful they may mate every two years.

Males often fight each other to mate with the females. However, once they have mated they do not stay with the females or help them look after the young.



While they are pregnant, females spend a great amount of time searching for food. They need to gain as much weight as they can to build up their stores of body fat to prepare them for the birth. Cubs are born from November to January. This is the coldest time of the year in the Northern Hemisphere! Polar bear cubs would not survive on the ice in these conditions so pregnant females need to prepare a sheltered place to give birth in. They dig a den in the snow!

The den is just big enough for the mother to turn around in and has a small ventilation hole in the roof for fresh air. Her body heat makes the inside of the den much warmer than the air outside. The pregnant female will give birth in the den and stay there for the winter to look after her young. She will not leave the den at all for about four months so she survives on her body fat.

Cubs are quite helpless when they are born. Their eyes are closed and they have only a small amount of fine hair. She feeds them milk and the cubs grow steadily. The mother and her cubs will emerge from the den in late March or April, when temperatures have warmed a little. By this time the cubs will have thick fur to protect them from the cold as they move to the sea ice to hunt.

A female polar bear is very protective of her young. She will carry them on her back through deep snow and water. She will teach them how to hunt for seals in the sea ice. When the cubs are 2- 2 ½ years old they are old enough to leave their mother.

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At what time of the year do females give birth to their cubs?

How many cubs are generally born in a litter?

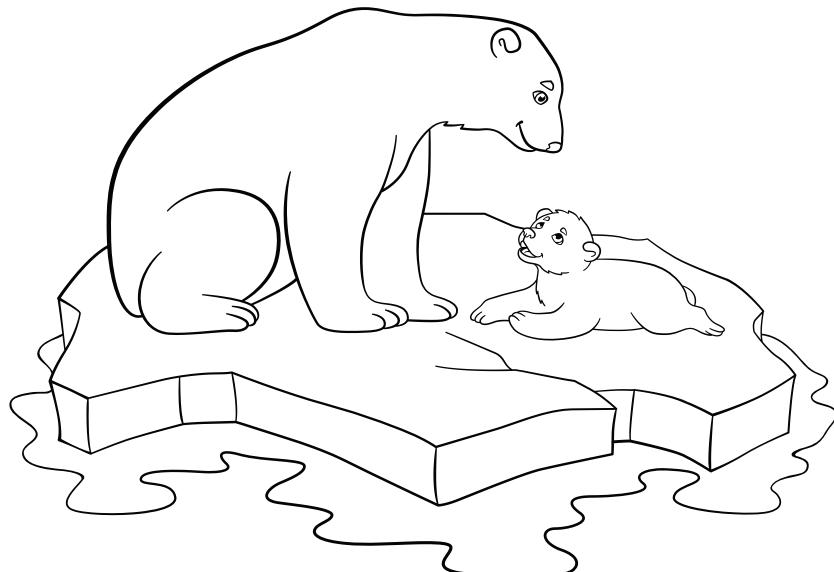
Do male polar bears help look after the young?

Why do females dig a den before giving birth?

How long do females stay with their cubs in the den?

How long do cubs stay with their mothers?

Where do polar bears cubs learn to hunt?



How does the female survive without food while she is in the den?