

Polar Bear Mothers and Cubs FAQ

How old is a female polar bear when she first has cubs? Five or six years.

How does a mother polar bear prepare for giving birth? She tries to put on as much weight as she can by eating seals. She needs to gain at least 220 pounds (100 kg)!

How many cubs does a mother polar bear usually have? Twins are the most common and, sometimes, a single cub. On rare occasions, a mother gives birth to triplets.

When are cubs born? The cubs are born in November or December.

Where are cubs born? They are born in snow dens that their mothers dig in the banks of snowdrifts.

How big are cubs when they are born? Polar bear cubs are surprisingly small. They are only 12 to 14 inches (30–35 cm) long and weigh about one pound (0.5 kg)!

Do cubs have fur when they are born? They are lightly furred. To stay warm in the snow den, they must snuggle up with their mother.

Do polar bear fathers help raise cubs? No, the polar bear father's only role is to mate with the mother. He does not help dig the den or take care of the cubs.

What do cubs eat? While in the den, they drink their mother's rich milk, which is 33% fat! That's almost like drinking melted butter. Later, after they leave the den, they will continue to nurse but will also learn to eat seals and seal fat.

Do cubs make sounds? They make a humming noise when they are nursing and also make cries when they want attention.

What is a snow den like? It has a narrow entrance tunnel that leads down to a room that the mother bear has dug in the snow. Some dens have more than one room—and some have small side rooms that the cubs dig when they are bigger!

How long does the family remain in the den? Depending on where in the Arctic they live, they leave the den in March, April, or May.

How long does a mother bear go without eating? Four to eight months, depending on where in the Arctic she lives.

Where does the family go after they leave the den? They usually hang around the den for a week or two while the cubs get used to the world outside the den. When the mother feels they are ready for the journey, she leads them to the sea ice so she can hunt seals. The mother is VERY hungry after going without food for so long.

Do cubs help with hunting? Not at first. They must learn to be quiet so their mother can catch a seal—and they learn how to hunt by watching her.



How long do cubs remain with their mothers? For about two and a half years, depending on where in the Arctic they live. During that time, they learn how to hunt and survive in the challenging environment of the Arctic.