

TOXOPLASMOSIS



Pregnant Woman With Cat. Photo Credit: photo © Getty / Buena Vista Images

Pregnant? You do NOT have to get rid of your cat!

Being pregnant when you have a cat presents some challenges, but none of them are even remotely insurmountable. Just a little planning and know-how is required. Cats and babies have coexisted peacefully for thousands of years.

The Facts About Pregnancy and Cat Litter

Because toxoplasmosis can cause birth defects in children, pregnant women sometimes assume that they must get rid of their cat. This is entirely unnecessary, as a few simple measures will thoroughly safeguard against catching the disease, especially from your cat. Toxoplasmosis is a disease caused by a parasite that can infect your cat if she eats prey already harbouring the parasite or comes into contact with contaminated soil. Toxoplasmosis is rare among indoor-only cats.

Note that cats who contract toxoplasmosis do not always show symptoms. To prevent getting infected with the disease, whenever you scoop or clean the litter box, wear disposable gloves and wash your hands immediately afterward. Even better, get a friend or adult member of the family to take over litter box maintenance while you are pregnant.

Eating raw or undercooked meat is the most common way that humans contract toxoplasmosis. If you eat meat, wash off all surfaces and utensils that touched raw meat, and don't prepare meat and raw foods like salads on the same cutting board.

Wash your hands thoroughly after handling raw meat.

If you have a garden, wear gloves when working in the soil. The toxoplasmosis parasite lives in the dirt, so also wash your hands well after gardening.

Many people naturally acquire an immunity to toxoplasmosis, and will not pass it on to their unborn child. In fact, the chances are that you have already been exposed to toxoplasmosis by handling raw meat or gardening without gloves. Millions of men, women, and children carry the *Toxoplasma* parasite, but very few have symptoms because the immune system usually keeps the parasite from causing illness. Your doctor can test to see if you are in this group.