

Pregnancy and Cats

Worries about the health of an unborn child weigh heavily on the mind of an expectant mum and there seems to be potential hazards everywhere you look.

People may warn you about the dangers of picking up toxoplasmosis from your cat as it is a huge risk. **Don't panic - find out the facts.**



BCWR Kittens
Bradford Cat Watch Rescue

Toxoplasmosis is caused by the infection of a parasite called *Toxoplasma gondii*. If a pregnant woman is infected during pregnancy (especially the first trimester) it can cause problems for the developing foetus. Cats can carry the parasite if they eat infected wildlife; however, this can only be passed on via faeces and you actually have to swallow the parasite to become infected. Cats do not present the greatest risk of meeting toxoplasmosis - undercooked meat and unwashed vegetables are a larger risk. There are simple precautions which you can take to avoid the problem.

- **Clean litter trays daily.** Get someone else to clean the litter tray while you are pregnant or wear rubber gloves.
- **Follow normal hygiene precautions** about keeping cats off kitchen surfaces and **washing your hands regularly.**
- **Wear gloves if you are gardening.** Wash vegetables carefully.
- **Wash hands after handling raw meat** and ensure it is cooked properly.

Problems are very rare and easily avoided if simple hygiene precautions are taken. If you are at all worried consult your doctor for more information. You can also contact Tommy's Campaign, which incorporates the Toxoplasma Trust, if you have worries.

It is also necessary to ensure that your cat does not have roundworms (*Toxocara* and *Toxascaris*). Keep up to date with your cat's regular working and take normal hygiene precautions and it will carry no more risk of passing anything on to your baby than you do.

Bringing home your first baby can be another fraught time - how will the cat react? Once again stay calm and don't create a tense atmosphere. Let the cat sniff the baby and find out just what this strange-smelling noisy little creature is, and let it investigate all the paraphernalia which goes with a new baby so that it does not feel threatened. The wonderful thing about cats is that they usually adapt to almost any situation and go back to their bed next to the radiator, curl up and go to sleep! Occasionally a very sensitive cat may become stressed and urinate in the house but this can be overcome by increasing its sense of security) and maintaining a good hygiene regimen. You may want to keep the baby's room as a no-go zone for cats initially for your own peace of mind.

Everyone has heard the old wives' tale about cats sitting on babies and suffocating them. Certainly cats love a warm spot and the crib in the nursery is usually very cosy, but most cats wait until the baby is taken out before they hop in. A little care will remove all the worry - make sure the cat is not in the nursery when you leave the baby to sleep. If you want to leave the door or window open put a cat net over the basket (or pram). This is only really a potential danger when the baby is very small and cannot turn over or move.