

Facts about Toxoplasmosis

Cats make wonderful family pets and studies have shown that living with a cat can even help lower your blood pressure and relieve stress.

Children who grow up with a cat or other pets are more likely to develop compassion and respect for animals and for other people. Yet many expectant parents or those with young children may worry about keeping a cat due to reports that cats may transmit the disease toxoplasmosis. Thousands of cats have been turned into shelters due to ignorance about this disease.

Toxoplasmosis is a disease caused by the parasite *toxoplasma gondii* and presents little danger to healthy adults.

- In fact, 50% of humans in the United States are already carrying this parasite with no harmful effects.
- It is true that if a fetus contracts it through the placenta of a newly infected mother, an abortion or birth defects could result.
- **Handling or eating raw or poorly cooked meat is the most common way to contract the disease;** but toxoplasmosis can be transmitted by a cat if a human ingests the parasite from contaminated feces.

If you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, ask your physician for a toxoplasma screen.

- If the test shows you already have antibodies against toxoplasma, then you are highly unlikely to become infected.

If you have never been exposed to toxoplasma and you are pregnant, **simple precautions can avoid any problems:**

- **Don't let your cat outside.** This way, you can be sure he or she won't come into contact with and ingest an infected animal.
- **Have someone else clean out the litter box** while you are trying to become pregnant and throughout pregnancy and keep young children from coming into contact with feces. If you must clean the litter box, be sure to wear gloves and a mask.
- **Make sure the litter box gets cleaned daily** since toxoplasma eggs must incubate for 48 hours before they are potentially infectious.
- **Wear gloves when gardening**
- **If you eat meat, cook it thoroughly** and wash your hands after touching any meat that is uncooked.