



# Should Pregnant Women Rehome Their Cats?

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A frequent concern during human pregnancy is the risk for *Toxoplasma gondii* infection (ie, toxoplasmosis) and its potential effect on the fetus. *Toxoplasma gondii* is a ubiquitous parasite that completes its life cycle in the intestine of cats. Oocysts that pass in cat feces can contaminate soil, drinking water, and some foods (eg, vegetables) and, if ingested, can infect humans and other animals.<sup>1</sup>

Because cats are the primary hosts of this zoonotic parasite, pregnant women may feel forced to relinquish their cat to avoid a harmful disease.

If *T gondii* is newly acquired (ie, first-time infection) during pregnancy and transmitted to the fetus, damage to the fetal CNS and eyes can result. Humans do not generally acquire toxoplasmosis from individual pet cats, as large numbers of oocysts are shed only once for less than 3 weeks and because most cats groom feces from their hair before oocysts become infective.<sup>2,3</sup>

It is prudent to have a nonpregnant family member clean the cat's litter box or to have the pregnant woman wear gloves when cleaning the litter box. There is, however, no reason to rehome the pet cat(s) for the duration of a woman's pregnancy. Avoiding eating inadequately processed or undercooked meat, wearing gloves while gardening and properly washing hands when finished, and avoiding drinking unfiltered water are much more important behaviors to avoid toxoplasmosis. Keeping cats indoors and preventing them from

hunting—as well as feeding them commercial, cooked diets—will help effectively eliminate the threat of disease exposure or transmission. ■

## References

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3. Brown RR, Elston TH, Evans L, et al. Feline zoonoses guidelines from the American Association of Feline Practitioners. *J Feline Med Surg*. 2005;7(4):243-274.

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