



BEHAVIOR  
SERIES

# Preparing Pets for a New Baby

**C**ONGRATULATIONS, YOU'RE EXPECTING A BABY! If your family already includes a pet, you'll need to help that first "baby" adjust to the new one you'll soon bring home. You can help your pet cope with this big change in much the same way parents help children understand that a new brother or sister will be joining the family. By following the tips below, you can ease your pet's stress, help her welcome your new baby, and ensure that your pet stays where she belongs—with you and your growing family.

## Can I Keep My Cat?

If you're pregnant, you've probably heard of toxoplasmosis because it can cause serious birth defects. However, toxoplasmosis is a rare disease in the United States and one that can easily be avoided. While the disease-causing parasite can be found in the feces of cats who ingest raw meat, birds, mice, or contaminated soil, toxoplasmosis is more commonly found in uncooked or undercooked meat.

If you're concerned about possible exposure, ask your obstetrician to perform a simple blood test. If the result shows you were exposed to toxoplasmosis during pregnancy, you may be given medication, and your baby may be tested and treated soon after birth. Keep in mind that the odds of contracting toxoplasmosis during pregnancy are extremely low, and even lower for your baby. Being pregnant does not mean you have to give up living with and caring for your beloved cat. Toxoplasmosis is easily avoided by practicing good hygiene and responsible pet care. Just follow these simple steps to reduce the risk:

- Avoid handling or eating uncooked meat.
- Keep your cat safely indoors and away from wildlife.
- Have someone else clean the litter box daily.

- If you must clean the litter box, wear rubber gloves and thoroughly wash your hands afterward.
- Feed cats only commercially prepared cat food.

## How Will My Pet React?

No matter how much you plan ahead, the addition of a new family member may be difficult for your pet. Remember, your dog or cat was your first "baby" and is used to being the center of your attention. So it's understandable that she may experience something akin to sibling rivalry when you introduce a new human baby into your household.

You can minimize this feeling by working with her *before* you bring home your baby. For example, because your new baby will demand a lot of your time and energy, gradually accustom your pet to spending less time with you. Drastically decreasing attention and frequently scolding, ignoring, or isolating your pet *after* the baby comes home will likely make your pet feel stressed. If your pet is particularly attached to the mother-to-be, another family member should develop a closer relationship with the animal. That way, your pet can still feel loved and provided for while mom is busy with the baby.

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