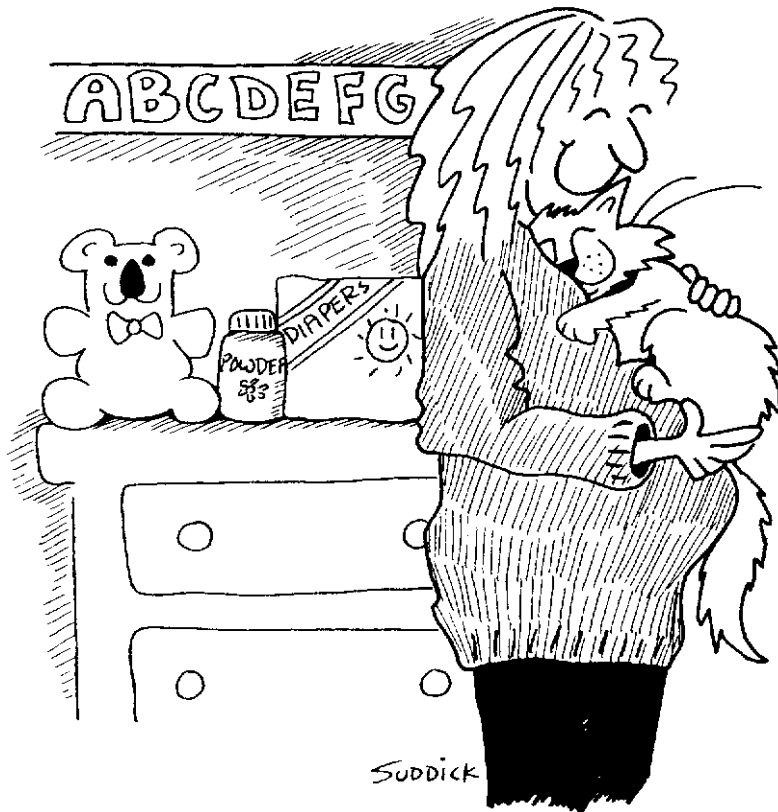


Pregnant? That's No Reason To Give Up Your Cat

Fear, rather than common sense, takes over when someone first hears that toxoplasmosis—a disease harmful to unborn babies—can be transmitted by cats. Unfortunately, this news leads many pregnant women, often urged by well-meaning friends and family, to give up their beloved feline. But the good news is that health professionals continue to assert that, if caution is taken, there is no reason why the family feline has to leave home.

Toxoplasmosis is a parasite found in rats, mice, pigs, cows, sheep, chickens and birds, and is shed in the feces of infected cats. The disease—transmitted to humans by handling contaminated meat, cat litter, or soil—can cause cold-like symptoms and may last one to 12 weeks with little to no lasting effects on most people. However, if a pregnant woman gets the disease, it can be transmitted to the fetus causing possible brain or eye defects. Health officials report that most infections result from eating undercooked meat, not from cats.

So there's no need to give up the family cat if you're pregnant. Simply get someone else to change the litter box for the duration of the pregnancy. If that's not possible, use gloves when handling the litter. And since the feces is not contagious for the first 24 hours, removing the litter daily and practicing good hygiene afterwards significantly reduces any chance of exposure. Follow these preventive measures and talk with your physician about how you can protect yourself from this disease, and you and your feline friends can continue enjoying each other's company for many years to come.



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