



## Preparing Your Cat for a New Baby

As if expectant mothers don't have enough to think about...now they might find themselves inundated with comments such as, "Of course you have to re-home your cat!" or "Don't you know cats steal babies' breath?" (They don't.) The reality is that most fears are overblown, and that your cat can still be a loved -- and *loving*-- part of your family even after a new baby has come home. To be sure, there are steps to take to ensure a smooth transition from cat-centered to baby-centered living, but they needn't be overwhelming if planned in advance.

1. **Take precautions against toxoplasmosis.** This is an infectious disease (caused by the protozoan parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*) that can cause severe injury or death to a developing fetus: that's the bad news. The good news is that toxoplasmosis, or "toxoplasma", is extremely rare in indoor cats. It is most often transmitted through infected feces or soil (which can contain egg spores), so indoors-only cats hardly ever become infected. Still, expectant mothers can further reduce any risk by wearing gloves and a mask while cleaning litter boxes, or asking another family member to do the job. Wearing gloves while gardening covers that base as well.
2. **Change your cat's environment gradually.** Whether preparing a nursery, painting walls or purchasing new furniture, do so in small stages to allow your cat time to adjust. Remember that cats rely on consistency, and even small changes to their environment can cause considerable stress. When the various areas are finished, play with your cat in those places to help build positive feelings about them.
3. **Do not allow the cat access to the baby's crib.** Some behavior consultants recommend booby-trapping the crib with balloons or shake cans, but these techniques can backfire and cause additional stress to the cat. A sturdy screen door, installed at the door to the nursery, can enable family members to hear the baby while keeping the cat out of the crib. Another option is to keep the regular door closed with a baby monitor in the room.
4. **Prepare the cat for baby sounds.** A baby's crying and screaming can be disturbing to a cat, so preparation is key. You can either purchase a recording of baby sounds or make one yourself (record a friend's baby or sit in a pediatrician's office, if permitted, and record the children's noises): play the tape at low volume while your cat is eating or playing. With each session, raise the volume just a little until your cat appears more comfortable with the sounds. Expose your cat as well to various baby toys, musical mobiles and other sound-making devices before the baby comes home.
5. **Prepare the cat for baby smells.** Begin to wear the kinds of lotions, powders and other products that will be used with the baby. After the birth, bring home a blanket from the hospital that had held the baby to allow your cat to adjust to those new smells as well.

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6. **Try to keep your cat's schedule intact.** While everyone is busy with a new baby, try not to neglect your cat. Have one person play with the cat while someone else tends to the baby. Use Feliway to mitigate the stress of multiple visitors; confine the cat to a safe room if necessary.
7. **Supervise the cat and baby whenever together.** Never leave a baby or small child unattended around an animal. No matter how young the child or gentle the animal, too many things can go wrong, and both parties could get hurt. When the baby grows into a mobile child, supervision will be more pressing than ever. Your child can never be allowed to grab, chase or pick up the cat, so keep child and cat separate (behind a locked door, if necessary) when supervision isn't possible.

Source: *Think Like A Cat*, by Pam Johnson-Bennett

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