

Cats and Babies



The purpose of this leaflet is to reassure mothers-to-be that babies and cats can, and do, live happily together. That initial feeling of panic, prompting some women to get rid of their cats, is not only misinformed and misguided but unnecessary and a great disservice to both them and their cats.

Common worries

Introducing a first baby into a household where one or more cats have lived in peace and contentment means that life is going to change for everybody, including the cats.

Fears of jealousy, scratching or the transference of disease produces doubts about keeping a pet. This doesn't arise when a second baby arrives for parents and cats are now experienced, vague fears have been allayed and a routine will have been set in which all can live amicably together.

Advice given in this leaflet is aimed mainly at the first time mother-to-be. Medical advice must be left to your GP, obstetrician, midwife or health visitor who will outline any particular precautions which you should take. However, strict attention to hygiene and keeping your cat in good health are the normal, common sense precautions which any young mother would take instinctively for the sake of the new baby as well as for the other members of the household.

So what's all the fuss about?

Babies and cats have lived together harmoniously for as long as anybody can remember, but they are other people's babies and other people's cats. Somehow, it is different when it is **your** baby and **your** cat.

Many young couples own a cat long before they start a family and it must be emphasised that their responsibilities to the kitten they provided with a home do not disappear just because a baby is about to arrive.



Tabatha with baby Rebecca.

How your cat will welcome a newcomer to his home will depend on the sort of cat you have. The most difficult to deal with will be the timid, nervous cat, liable to run and hide when visitors arrive and only really happy with you. His reactions will be fairly predictable and you might expect signs of jealousy in an outbreak of spraying, especially in places used by you and your new baby.

The endless patience you have had in making him a happy pet can be negated in two minutes by harsh words and other signs of your displeasure. If you are tempted to rehome him, remember that you offered him a home, knowing his shortcomings and he is still your responsibility.

Somewhat less of a problem will be the devoted cat, the one that follows you about and wants to join in all you do. He is going to be the one most easily hurt if he thinks he has lost your affection, but also the one most likely to enlarge his affections to include the new baby if you let him.

Easiest of all to deal with will be the cat about the house with whom you have a somewhat impersonal relationship, the

Front cover picture: Ariadne with Freya Stealey.



Moffat with Caroline and Freya Stealey.

type who eats and sleeps, accepts petting when it suits him and generally goes his own way. He should be no trouble at all, provided his routine remains largely unchanged.

It really isn't necessary to neglect either baby or cat, but it is necessary to teach both mutual respect and the success of this depends largely on the new parents...and a little forethought and planning.

Before baby arrives

- Ignore the scare stories that some people will enjoy telling you - disasters they have heard about are noteworthy only because they are so rare.
- As soon as your pregnancy is confirmed, get all the information you can from your doctor and health visitor about any risks to unborn babies from organisms known to be carried by cats and take any precautions advised by them.
- Do your part by making sure your cat is in

good health. Have him examined by your vet. Be meticulous about grooming, de-worming, de-fleaing and keep booster injections up to date.

- If you have neglected having your pet neutered, take him to the vet without delay. Not only does a neutered cat make a better pet, you avoid any additional risks of disease being brought home by a wandering unneutered cat.
- With at least six months to prepare, start a new cat routine - if you need to - so that it will have become familiar to him, and to you, long before your baby arrives.
- As you introduce large items of baby equipment and nursery furniture into the house, let your cat investigate and sniff them but do not allow him to get inside the cot, pram or bath. Make it clear to him that inside such items is expressly forbidden and do this well before your tiny baby is born.
- Provide yourself with a cot and/or pram net but remember when it comes to using

it that it must be kept taut or it will become a comfortable hammock for a sleeping cat. Fit a net to the pram when the hood is up so no marauding cat can get nearer than the apron.

New routines

1. If your cat has had free access to all parts of the house, start putting the area you intend using as a nursery out of bounds, so that he learns to keep away well before your baby is brought into the room. Beware of the overcurious, determined cat who would scratch at a closed door to get in.
2. Reduce the amount of time you spend petting your cat, especially if he has become used to the permanent occupancy of your lap. You won't have the time after the arrival of the new baby. Even if he proves to be a good sleeper and no trouble when awake, there will be many other things to occupy your time.
3. Wear protective gloves and possibly a plastic apron when dealing with litter trays and remember to wash your hands carefully afterwards. Or ask someone to do the tray for you.
4. Get into the habit of clearing away any uneaten cat food left lying about. It attracts flies and, later on, toddlers. Select the best place for the cat's food bowl, drinking water and litter tray as far away as possible from areas you intend using for the preparation of the baby's meals.

After the happy event

It is never too early to learn about cats and it is important to achieve a growing confidence with animals based on respect, kindness, love and understanding. This is the basis of a true companionship between a child and his pet.

Your baby will be about three months old before he really notices the cat. However, the cat will have noticed him right from the day of his arrival and will be aware that

there is an unfamiliar being in the house. Of course he is going to be curious about this new dimension in his life, so **don't panic** when he sniffs the baby's feet or when he hangs about the pram like a guard-cat.

Not all cats are baby-lovers, however, so don't be offended if he takes himself off and seems less enchanted with your new son or daughter than you are. The cat will be very wary of the newcomer until he has got used to the situation.

A few dos...

- Keep the nursery door closed when the baby is sleeping in his cot and, just before closing the door, check that there isn't a cat hiding under the bed or behind a cupboard. Similarly, make sure that any open window is cat-proof. You may trust your own cat but an open window is an invitation to a strange cat passing by. Having sealed off the nursery, rely on a baby alarm system to know when the baby cries.
- Keep all the baby's feeding utensils out of reach of a wandering cat by using a covered sterilising unit. Wipe up immediately any spilt milk or baby food so that the cat is not tempted to do it for you.
- DO keep baby and cat foods well separated and keep all animal medicines, flea powders, etc separate from medicines intended for the human members of the family. Bottles and packets are sometimes remarkably similar and mistakes have been known to happen.
- Set aside part of each day to make a fuss of the cat. Allow for the fact that you are going to be busier and, at times, irritable. It is too easy to take it out on the cat when you have had a trying time, or to neglect him altogether.
- Try to keep calm when things get on top of you. Remember that when you get over-tired, anxious and easily upset, both baby

and cat will react by becoming tense and upset themselves.

There will be times when you hardly know which way to turn ... you are preparing dinner, the telephone starts to ring and, at the same time, the baby wakes up and yells to be fed. In your haste to deal with the situation, you fall over the cat who has turned up to see what all the commotion is about. It is then time to stop and calm down. Don't try to do everything at once.

Your priorities should be: baby first, cat second, telephone and dinner a poor third. Above all, don't feel guilty or inadequate because you cannot satisfy all the demands made on you. The calmer you remain, the easier it will be for you, and everyone else as well.

- Make a special effort to ensure that your cat's injections, teeth examinations, de-fleaing, de-worming and daily grooming are not forgotten in the general excitement

of having a baby to care for. Use a flea treatment which is safe if the baby's fingers come in contact with it from the cat's fur. Your vet will advise which sprays and powders might be best avoided.

- Keep the cat's bedding clean and changed regularly. It is good sense to use cardboard boxes as beds which can be burned and replaced at no cost.

- Be particularly careful to empty litter trays frequently. Keep the tray and its surrounding area washed and disinfected daily. Wash your hands thoroughly after cleaning litter trays, food bowls or grooming the cat.

- Encourage your visitors, including your midwife and health visitor, to acknowledge the cat at least after they have enthused over the baby. A natural cat lover will do this anyway



Tesco and Freya Stealey.

...and don'ts

- Don't leave a new baby alone with a cat...not even one you have known and trusted for years.
- Don't suddenly make your cat feel that he has lost your love. Your husband can help by paying greater attention to the cat while you are busy with the baby.
- Don't forget that some cats are attracted to wool - and eat it! They might be particularly attracted to shawls and blankets.

The toddler stage

From their earliest days, children should be taught to be gentle and kind with pets and to recognise them as being different from the cuddly toys they are allowed to chew, squeeze and throw out of the pram.

Babies learn by example. If you treat your cat with love, respect and gentleness, it is more likely that your children will grow up to do the same.

As soon as your baby can understand, point out that cats become frightened when he shouts, makes sudden movements or grasps at ears or tail.

Cats become particularly frightened if cornered and it is a kindness to provide a

safe haven for your cat to take refuge once your baby starts to crawl. High window sills and cupboard tops enable your pet to be part of the scene but safe.

Most cats will put up with a certain amount of "loving" and pulling about and will go away when they have had enough. It is important, however, to teach a young child not to touch a cat which is sleeping or eating. And, of course, tail pulling is not allowed.

Later on you can progress to teaching your toddler cat language so that he can interpret for himself the swishing tail, ruffled fur, purring, hissing and rubbing against the legs.

Continue to be careful about hygiene. Once your baby crawls, it is even more important to put the cat's food bowl where he can find it, but not the baby if you don't your youngster trying Whiskas. Similarly, keep the baby's plates and dishes out of the way of an inquisitive cat.

Keep litter trays out of reach of a toddler and keep the potty in the lavatory where the cat is less likely to be able to find it and be attracted. Teach your toddler to wash his hands after playing with the cat and before eating. It all becomes just part of normal training.



During the early days with a new baby, you might even find your cat a great comfort to you. And later on, he might prove to be an unexpected help when it comes to amusing and interesting a growing child.

Your growing child will have the benefit of learning from you how to treat your cat - with love, respect and gentleness, and this is a vital lesson for the rest of his life. Your cat will be very grateful to you for not ousting him from his home, but allowing him to share your joy in your new baby.

***Published for distribution to cat owners.
A donation to cover costs would be welcome.***



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