





# Toxoplasmosis

## What is toxoplasmosis?

Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a tiny germ called a protozoan. It affects humans and many kinds of animals, including cats and birds.



## How do people catch it?

Toxoplasmosis does not spread like a virus. The germ must enter the digestive tract through the mouth via:

-  Raw or uncooked meat (any type)
-  Cat faeces and the soil contaminated by cat faeces
-  Unpasteurised goat's milk and dairy products made from goat's milk
-  Vegetables, salad or fruit where the soil has not been properly washed off

## What are the effects?

Most people who catch it do not have any ill effects at all, although they can suffer 'flu-like symptoms or swollen glands which wear off in a week or two. There are two groups for whom toxoplasmosis may be serious:

-  People whose body defences are weak, such as cancer patients or those with AIDS.
-  Pregnant women. If the mother has the germ, there is a risk it can affect her unborn baby.

## How do cats pick up the toxoplasmosis germ?

This usually happens when a kitten goes on his first hunting venture and eats a bird or rodent carrying the germ. The germ reproduces in the cat and is excreted in his faeces for about two weeks afterwards.

## Is it safe to handle cats?

The cat most likely to be carrying toxoplasmosis is a young kitten, and then only for a couple of weeks. After that, it is extremely unlikely to pose any threat unless it becomes ill with a serious disease such as feline leukaemia virus (FeLV) or feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV). Even then, unless he has diarrhoea and is incontinent, the chance of toxoplasmosis being transmitted to a human is unlikely, given the cat's fastidious cleaning habits.

## How can I safeguard against toxoplasmosis?

By following the basic rules of personal and kitchen hygiene, there should be no risk to humans of toxoplasmosis:

- 🐾 Only eat meat which is well cooked. Keep surfaces on which raw meat has been prepared scrupulously clean. Keep raw meat separated from cooked meat. Always wash hands with soap and water after handling raw meat
- 🐾 Avoid unpasteurised goat's milk
- 🐾 Wash hands after gardening. Never eat with soil-covered hands
- 🐾 Wash soil-covered vegetables and salad carefully until quite clean
- 🐾 If your cat uses a litter tray, remove faeces at least once a day. Wash hands with soap and water immediately afterwards
- 🐾 If you are pregnant, ask someone else to deal with the litter tray
- 🐾 Avoid cuddling, or allowing onto work surfaces, cats which are ill.