



## Reducing the risk of getting toxoplasmosis while pregnant

Toxoplasmosis is caused by the parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*. The most common way to get it is by:

- ▶ swallowing something contaminated with the faeces (poo) of infected cats
- ▶ swallowing or handling the undercooked or raw meat or products of infected animals or birds
- ▶ a newly infected mother passing it to her unborn baby
- ▶ handling an infected lambing ewe (sheep), the afterbirth or her new-born lamb

Sometimes it causes flu-like symptoms. However, it often causes no symptoms so you may not know you've been infected. Infection during pregnancy can be dangerous. Toxoplasmosis cannot be caught by stroking a cat or owning a cat. If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy you do not need to give up your cat.

**Avoiding exposure to cat faeces** and taking the following **sensible food and hygiene precautions** will reduce your risk of exposure to *Toxoplasma gondii* during pregnancy:

- Wash your hands with soap and water carefully and regularly. This prevents spreading all sorts of infections.
- Don't touch new-born lambs, lambing ewes or the dirty clothing used by those handling them.
- If cat litter is provided, change it daily:
  - ▶ The parasite does not become infectious until 1 to 5 days after it is shed in cat faeces.
  - ▶ Always use a utensil to remove faeces, for example, a cat litter scoop.
  - ▶ Carefully wash hands immediately afterwards with soap and water.
  - ▶ Where possible, get someone else to change the litter while you are pregnant. However, if no one else can do it, wear disposable gloves and wash your hands carefully with soap and water immediately afterwards. You should avoid touching your face or mouth until you wash your hands.
- Do not feed raw or undercooked meats to cats as it may be a source of *Toxoplasma gondii*.
- If safe, try to prevent cats from hunting birds and other prey by use of a bell collar.
- Even if you don't have a cat, be careful with soil and sand as they could have cat faeces:
  - ✓ Wear gloves when you are gardening or handling sand and avoid touching your face or mouth.
  - ✓ Wash your hands well afterwards.
- If you have a children's sandpit or sandbox, make sure to:
  - ✓ cover it when not in use, so cats cannot use it as a toilet
  - ✓ wear gloves when handling sand from it
  - ✓ wash hands well after any contact with it
- Choose your food carefully because *Toxoplasma gondii* can be found in some food products. Do not eat:
  - ✗ undercooked or raw meat
  - ✗ cured meats like salami, chorizo or Parma ham
  - ✗ undercooked or raw eggs and egg products
- Don't drink or eat **unpasteurised** milk or milk products (such as yogurt, cheese and ice-cream) from goats, cows or sheep. They can carry bacteria and parasites that can be particularly dangerous during pregnancy.
- Store and prepare your food carefully:
  - ✓ Store raw meat carefully so that blood or fluids do not infect other foods in your fridge.
  - ✓ Have a separate chopping board for raw meat.
  - ✓ Cook meat completely (no pink should be seen and juices should be clear).
  - ✓ Cook eggs fully.
  - ✓ Wash salad leaves and peel or wash raw fruit and vegetables to get rid of any soil before eating.
  - ✓ Thoroughly wash chopping boards, surfaces and utensils (such as knives) that have had contact with raw meat, poultry, fish or unwashed fruit and vegetables.
  - ✓ Wash hands with soap and water before, during and after preparing food and before eating.
  - ✓ For lots of reasons, it is important to be careful with the foods you eat while pregnant – visit [www.mychild.ie](http://www.mychild.ie) for advice.