



Toxoplasmosis

What is Toxoplasmosis?

Toxoplasmosis is a disease caused by a parasite called *Toxoplasma gondii*. As many as 60 million people in the U.S. may be infected but very few of them will have any symptoms. A healthy person's immune system usually keeps the parasite from causing illness. In pregnant women and persons who are immune compromised, toxoplasmosis can cause serious health problems.

How is Toxoplasmosis spread?

- Eating undercooked, contaminated meat (especially pork, lamb, and venison).
- Eating food prepared with contaminated knives, kitchen utensils, and cutting boards.
- Drinking water contaminated with *Toxoplasma*.
- Cats are a primary reservoir of *Toxoplasma gondii*. People may accidentally swallow the parasite by coming in contact with contaminated cat feces while changing the cat litter, or by touching or eating anything that has come in contact with contaminated cat feces.
- Passing it from mother to baby during pregnancy.

How is Toxoplasmosis treated?

For pregnant women and persons with a weakened immune system there are medications available. Healthy persons who are not pregnant do not usually need treatment. If you think you might have toxoplasmosis, contact your healthcare provider.

How can Toxoplasmosis be prevented?

- Cook food to safe temperatures.
- Beef, lamb, veal roasts and steaks should be 145°F throughout.
- Pork, ground meat, and wild game should be cooked to 160°F.
- Whole chickens should be cooked to 180°F.
- Peel and wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, counters, utensils, and hands with hot soapy water after contact with raw meat, poultry, seafood, or unwashed fruits and vegetables.

- Freeze meat for several days before cooking to reduce the chances of infection.
- Wear gloves when gardening because of the possible exposure to cat feces.

If you are pregnant or have a weakened immune system:

- Keep your cat indoors.
- Do not adopt or handle stray cats, especially kittens.
- Feed cats only commercial canned or dried food.
- Cover outdoor sandboxes.
- Have someone else change the litter box daily; the *Toxoplasma* parasite doesn't become infectious until 1-5 days after it is shed in the cat feces.
- Cats only spread *Toxoplasma* in their feces for a few weeks after becoming infected. They usually don't have symptoms and the infection will go away without treatment.

Symptoms of Toxoplasmosis:

Most people who are infected do not have symptoms. If symptoms occur they are usually:

- Fever
- Muscle Aches
- Swollen lymph glands

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