

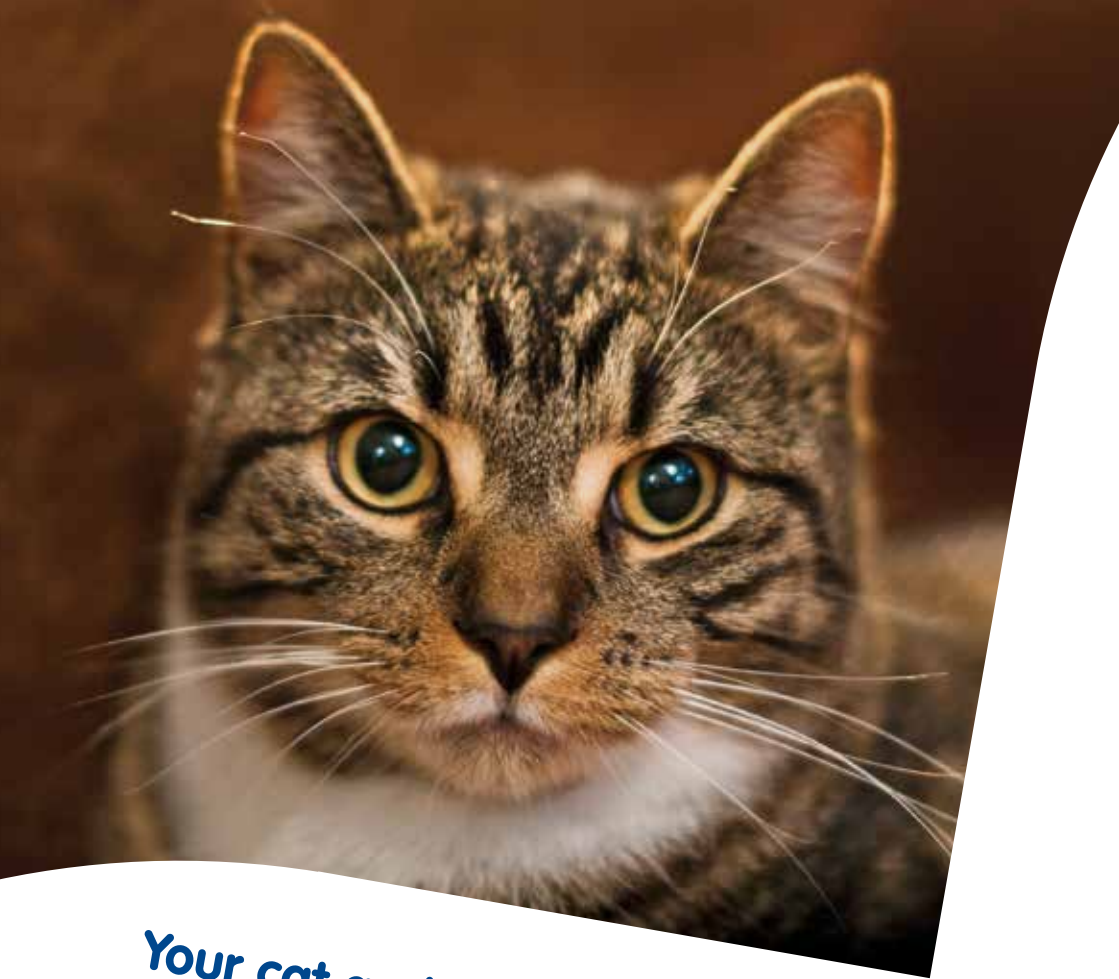
CAT 25

Your cat and your baby

A close-up photograph of a tabby cat with a white patch on its chest, looking upwards with wide, curious eyes. The cat is sitting on a blue and green patterned surface. In the background, there is a colorful, out-of-focus toy house with orange, yellow, and red sections.

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PETS
CROSS

The charity dedicated to
helping sick, injured and
homeless pets since 1897.



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Start your preparations early

As soon as you know there is a baby on the way, you and your family will begin to prepare yourselves for the changes ahead. Your cat will also need to be prepared for the new arrival, as there will be alterations to the home environment and routine once the baby comes into the house. With a little forward planning, you can get your pets used to the changes well in advance, so that your cat should hardly notice any difference when the baby actually arrives. You should start to make preparations four months in advance of the birth – do not leave it until the baby has arrived. The whole family can enjoy the benefits that having a cat can bring by following the advice in this leaflet.

Before the baby is born

Handling

All cats are different when it comes to handling - some are happy to be touched all over, whereas others may only enjoy being stroked on their head or shoulders. It's common for most cats to be sensitive around their stomach area and tail. If your cat doesn't like being touched in certain

areas, you will have to be mindful of this when your baby becomes more mobile, as babies can "grab" in their enthusiasm to want to touch and stroke, which can easily upset your cat.

Avoid playing games that involve your hands, however tempting! Even if your cat is gentle when playing, it's always best to use toys instead, as you don't want your cat to favour fingers or hands, especially when your baby arrives.

Sounds

To help prepare your cat for the sounds that babies make, play recordings of a baby crying, gurgling and screaming for short periods during the day. Initially the sound should be barely audible, increasing the volume gradually as your cat grows accustomed to the noises.

It's important that your cat feels calm and relaxed with the sounds before you increase the volume, so remember to take this slowly.



New smells and objects

A cat's primary sense is smell, so new products and objects bought into the house can be a particularly challenging and threatening time for them. Get your cat used to baby powder, soaps, shampoos and baby milk by using them in the months leading up to your baby's arrival. It is also a good idea to put some of the new products on your own skin (eg powder, baby lotion) – this way the new smells can mingle with a familiar "safe" smell, which is likely to be less of a concern for your cat. Playpens, cots, pushchairs, highchairs and changing mats should be in place before the baby arrives. To make the new objects smell more familiar (and therefore less threatening) wipe a soft cloth over your cat's head and then using the same area of the cloth, wipe the new baby items. You may wish to install a Feliway diffuser (available from your vet), which is a synthetic version of the facial pheromones produced by the glands on your cat's face – this can help your cat feel more secure during this potentially stressful time.

Food

When your baby begins to toddle and explore, cat food may prove an irresistible attraction so accustom your cat to eating in an area, preferably off the ground, where your child won't be able to reach.



A quiet place to go

You are likely to have lots of visitors when your new baby arrives, including family, friends and health visitors. Some sociable cats may enjoy the extra attention that they get from visitors, whereas others may become overwhelmed if it is something they are not used to. Cats should always have a quiet, safe place to go to whenever they need to rest or retreat from visitors. This will be especially important to them once the baby arrives and eventually begins to toddle about. Cats prefer high, dark, secluded places that have a good view of the household activities. A tall scratching post with extra tiers or a high shelf is ideal for this, as your cat will be able to get used to what's going on at a safe distance. Encourage your cat to use these areas by placing a few tasty treats



and bedding on them. If your cat is on the nervous side, it's a good idea to ask your visitors to ignore your cat when they are in their "safe" place.

Toys

Cat toys and baby toys are often made of similar materials. Some toys even make the same kind of noise, such as a squeak or rattle. It's not surprising then that babies will pick up and chew the cat's toys. Tidy them away, but remember to bring them out and play with your cat throughout the day.

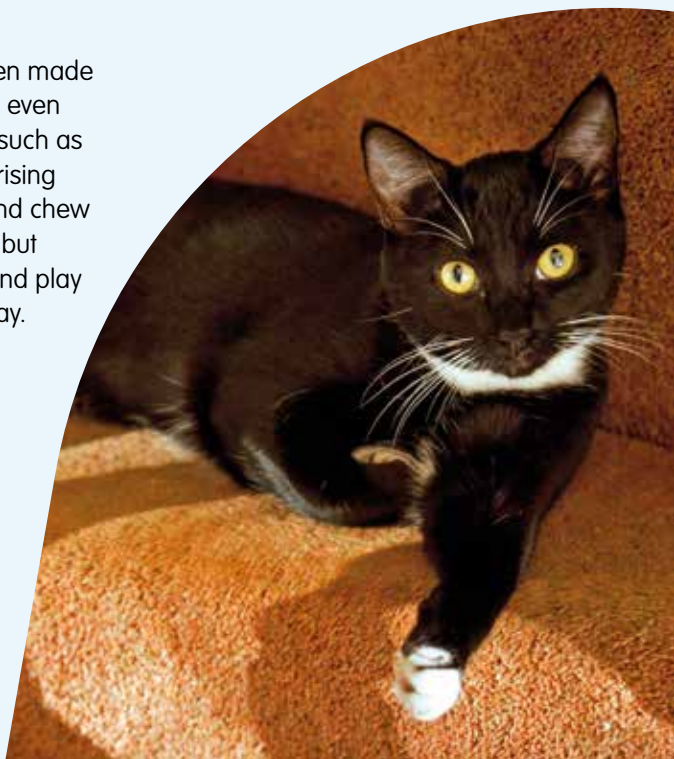
Resting and sleeping places

You should decide if you will need to change where your cat currently rests and sleeps. For example, the spare room where your cat usually has free access may become the

nursery. Gradually encourage your cat to sleep in other areas and then keep the nursery door closed. Make this and other changes well in advance so your cat does not associate the change with the arrival of the baby.

Health matters

Make sure that your cat is in good physical health. Your cat should also be free from fleas and worms. Any suspicions about illness or developing ailments should be checked out by a qualified vet. Any pain or irritation that a cat is feeling will lower their tolerance to the changes that are about to happen, which may lead to spraying or aggression.



How will your pet react?

If your pet has already experienced the arrival of a new baby, and has coped well, you should not have too many problems. However, if this is the first time your pet will be living with a new baby, ask yourself the following questions. Once the baby comes, will you want to exclude your cat from certain areas of the house? Does your pet have any behavioural problems? If so, they may get worse once a baby has arrived. You should contact your vet for a referral to a pet behaviour counsellor if you need help.

If you are happy with your cat's behaviour, then you can proceed with the general advice given in this leaflet.

After the baby is born

First introductions

The baby should be introduced in a quiet room where the cat has few associations – not a place where the cat usually sleeps or eats. Hold the baby in your arms and allow your cat to sniff them. Reward your cat's calm behaviour with gentle praise and tasty titbits. The cat will appear interested for a few seconds and will then lose interest. If your cat prefers to run away from the baby, that's fine. Forcing your cat to interact with the baby could be very stressful. Allow your cat to escape and investigate in their own time. Carry on with the normal daily duties and routine and your cat should readily accept the new arrival.

Hygiene

Due to hygiene concerns, people who do not have pets of their own may try and encourage you to rehome your cat. It's essential that your cat is treated for worms and fleas regularly, using products from your vet. Don't leave dirty nappies on the floor, as they can cause the cat to wet





or mess on that spot.

Use antibacterial soap to clean your hands after feeding, grooming or playing with your cat and always wear rubber gloves, which are washed afterwards, to clean your cat's litter tray.

Supervision

Don't put your baby on the floor with the cat and never leave your cat unsupervised with a baby. This includes all cats, even those with an excellent temperament. Using a screen door for the baby's nursery allows you to keep the door shut, but still see and hear the baby. You might also want to think about using a cot and pram net to prevent your cat from investigating the sleeping baby.

Toddlers

Your baby will soon start crawling and toddling and it's important to remain vigilant once they begin to move about. It's especially important to make sure that your cat has a safe place to rest and relax, which is inaccessible to the toddler. This will avoid the situation where the cat is continually followed, cornered and pestered by the infant. Finally, remember to place your cat's litter tray in a quiet area away from areas your infant has access to.

Additional information

Blue Cross produces a range of leaflets, which offer guidance about lots of different pets and issues. Ones that you may find particularly useful are:

- Caring for your adult cat (C3)
- How to play with your cat (C24)

Happy, healthy pets

Blue Cross advice leaflets are packed full of top tips to help owners with their pet questions. They cover a wide range of topics, from training a puppy to caring for an older cat. So if you need some support to help you with a pet problem, whether it's about a dog or a degu, we're here for you.

You can read and download our leaflets online at www.bluecross.org.uk

Visit our website to take advantage of all its features, including:

- blog posts from Blue Cross experts
- latest news
- events near you
- pets needing new homes

Or you can join in the chat on our online communities. Find us on Twitter and Facebook – just search for Blue Cross.



Blue Cross

Blue Cross has been dedicated to the health and happiness of pets since 1897. Abandoned or unwanted, ill or injured – we do what's needed to give every pet a healthy life in a happy home. We're a charity, so the more help you give us, the more help we can give pets.

How you can help

Blue Cross doesn't receive any government funding, so we rely on the generosity of pet lovers like you. There are lots of ways you can help the sick, injured and abandoned pets in our care, like making a donation, fundraising for us or leaving us a legacy.

Please call us on 0300 777 1897 or visit www.bluecross.org.uk



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