Spotlight on Toxoplasmosis

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The tiny protozoan *Toxoplasma gondii* can have a big impact on cats and the people who love them. *T. gondii* is a parasite that causes Toxoplasmosis, a disease with flu-like symptoms in children and immunocompromised adults. In addition, *T. gondii* can cause pregnant women to miscarry. Therefore, pregnant women should never clean or change litter boxes. Thankfully, cats and most people are not affected by *T. gondii*.

While *T. gondii* can infect many mammals, its primary hosts are cats. Cats become infected with *T. gondii* either by ingesting infected wildlife or infected, uncooked meat. The disease is spread via the millions of resulting oocysts (organisms similar to eggs) excreted in a cat's feces. One to five days after being passed, the oocysts become infectious. If the oocyst is consumed by an intermediate host (most mammals, including humans) that happens to be pregnant, the spores released by the oocysts can cross the placenta and infect the fetus. And since the fetus' underdeveloped immune system doesn't recognize *T. gondii* as dangerous, the fetus can become very sick and possibly abort.

Automatic litter boxes minimize handling for an easier and healthier way to remove waste.

Though *T. gondii* infection in cats is not uncommon, actual Toxoplasmosis disease symptoms are rare. Even an infected cat can appear healthy. Some cats, however, develop pneumonia, liver damage, digestive problems, neurological problems, and other health problems. Science has not yet determined why *T. gondii* affects only some cats.

Currently, no vaccination exists to prevent *T. gondii*. To prevent Toxoplasmosis in your family, thoroughly cook any meat, wash hands after handling meat, wear protective gloves while cleaning your cat's litter box, then wash hands thoroughly.

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Additionally, never allow a pregnant woman to clean the litter box.

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