



Prenatal Preparation for Pet Owners

A guide to help new parents prepare their pets before baby arrives

Congratulations!

You're expecting a new baby! Did you know that 53% of Canadians have a household pet? But every year thousands of good pets are given up because new parents are not quite prepared for this busy time. In some cases, the family pet is shut away and kept apart from everyone. Others are moved outdoors to a pen or chained to a dog house out back. As new parents, of course you want to prepare properly for your baby's arrival. That doesn't mean that you should give up your faithful family pet. All the experts agree that pets help us reduce stress. This is the time to train your pet(s) for your new arrival. This will be a big change for everyone, especially if this is your first child. After you are all settled into your new routine with your baby, both you and your pet(s) will be glad you took the time to prepare for success.

It's Important to Plan

Routines are good for pets and make them feel more secure. If you make changes in their routine now, your pet(s) will feel more confident when your baby comes home. Waiting until you bring your baby home just places unneeded stress on both you and your pets.

Tips for All Pets:

- ❃ If your pets are not used to being around children, invite friends and family who do have children over to visit and spend some time socializing with your pet(s).
- ❃ It's going to be very busy when you first bring your baby home. Be a little 'cool to be kind' right now and spend less time directly playing with your pets, even if you are still hanging out with them.
- ❃ Dogs and cats are very attracted to odors. If you are planning on using disposable diapers, consider buying an airtight container such as a Diaper Genie. If you are going with cloth diapers, make sure you have a snug lid on your diaper pail.
- ❃ While you are still at the hospital, send home the first receiving blanket your baby is wrapped in. Have it placed where your pet(s) can sniff and become familiar with the new scent.

Cats

Cats can live quite safely with babies. Make the time now to:

- ❃ If you aren't already doing so, start clipping the cats nails regularly so that kitty gets used to this.

- ❃ Once you have decided which room will be the nursery, keep the door closed so the cat gets used to not going in there at all.
- ❃ Start playing with your cat in a separate area of the house. If they don't have a cat tower, consider investing in one. Later when baby starts crawling, that will give kitty a refuge away from little hands.

Dogs

Help your 'best friend' get ready by:

- ❃ Going for a refresher class in obedience training.
- ❃ Setting up the nursery as soon as possible so it will be familiar. This will also let you start setting boundaries with the nursery.
- ❃ If your dog hasn't been to your local Doggy Daycare, arrange for a few visits before baby comes home. Later, when you and/or your pet needs a break, or you have an appointment, going to Doggy Daycare won't be so strange.
- ❃ Invest in a baby carrier, such as a Snuggli, so you can still enjoy walking your best friend

Before the Baby Arrives

- ❃ Make arrangements for a good friend or family member to pet sit for you when you go to the hospital.
- ❃ Hire a dog walker for the first couple of weeks after your baby is born. It will take a lot of pressure off you and will help keep your dog settled

Introductions

- ❃ Let Mom come in first and greet the pet(s) away from the nursery.
- ❃ Everyone has missed "Mom" while she was gone and will be reassured to see her.
- ❃ Meanwhile, Dad can bring the baby into the nursery.
- ❃ Take it slow – praise all good behavior lavishly.
- ❃ Keep the nursery door closed when you and/or baby are sleeping. Use a crib monitor for peace of mind.
- ❃ It is just sensible practice not to leave babies or small children alone with any pets.
- ❃ If there are any problems, get the help of a trainer before they get out of hand.

Remember that keeping your pets when you have a new child will teach the whole family the important values of commitment and compassion.