

Before the Baby

You can begin to help your cat adjust to the new addition before the baby arrives.

Jessie Tucker Mitchell

After the birth, while Mom and baby remain at the hospital, someone should bring the baby's blanket home and place it where the cat can sniff and rub against it. The best location is near your cat's food dish, so it associates the baby's unique smell with positive feelings.

The key is to help the cat to not only tolerate the baby, but also to want to be around the baby to like the baby, Werber says. The best way to make something positive for a cat is to associate [it] with a reward. Once the baby comes, pour on the food treats.

The acceptance process does not end on the baby's birthday. When Mom returns home, she should take several uninterrupted minutes to reconnect with the cat before introducing the baby. Then invite the cat to sit with Mom beside the baby, rewarding appropriate behavior. However, never force your cat to go near the baby.

Don't make a big deal out of it, Werber says. You're not trying to get the cat and the baby to be buddies. You're just trying to make a positive association. The worst thing you can do is force the cat to do what it doesn't want to do.

Susan Nelson, assistant professor of clinical sciences at the Kansas State University Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital, encourages new moms to allow their cats to approach while nursing.

I let my cats sit on my lap while nursing and holding the baby, Nelson says. It finally got to the point where I would have the baby and one or two cats on my lap.

Maintaining harmony in the home is an important goal, especially at a time when so many changes occur. If expectant parents follow the suggestions above, they will enjoy an easier transition for everyone in the family and keep their cats comfortable and content.