

Keep 'Em Both: Cats and Babies

Put your worries to rest: Babies and cats can peacefully co-exist.

Marty Becker, DVM, and Janice Willard, DVM

Occasionally I see cats engage in destructive behavior if they perceive they are not getting enough attention once the baby is brought home, said Robin Downing, DVM, a veterinarian at the Windsor Veterinary Clinic in Windsor, Colo. Folks just need to make a short play period each day for the cat.

Some cats get depressed and stop eating when a new infant comes home, Weigner said. They are used to being the center of attention, and now the whole commotion is about the new baby. If no one notices the cat hasn't eaten for a while, it can get quite ill. I recommend [that] new parents spend at least half an hour twice a day with their cats, without the baby around.

Ease the transition of moving a baby into your house by bringing in a blanket with the babys smells on it a day or two before the infant arrives. [This] is a good way for the cat to get acquainted with the idea that there will be another human in the household soon, Downing said.

And after the baby has come home, consider limiting the number of visitors and the amount of time spent with them.

Baby Safety The myths that cats will suffocate a sleeping baby or stick their muzzles in a babys mouth and suck the life out of it, are a challenge to put to rest. However, there is no substantiating evidence that these rumors are true.

Ill-informed people have been warning pregnant women and new mothers away from their kitties ... , said Clea Simon, author of *The Feline Mystique*. Cats don't 'steal an infants breath, but they do gently sniff at whatever they are curious about. Cats don't 'smother babies, either, but they do like to cuddle against warm creatures on cold nights.

We have found our own cat curled up with our infants, sleeping. If an infant is too young to raise its head, perhaps there is a remote possibility of suffocation if the cat curls up next to the childs face, Weigner said. I tell my clients not to leave their babies unattended with their cats until [the babies] can easily lift their heads.