



Toxoplasma gondii

A recent study by Food Standards Australia New Zealand and the ANU found there were 15,500 cases of toxoplasmosis in Australia each year. Infection with Toxoplasma is very risky for pregnant women and their babies as well as people with compromised immune systems where it can cause blindness and stroke.

While only 17% of Australians say they have heard of toxoplasmosis 25% to 30% show signs of past Toxoplasma infections One common way people get an infection is via cats, though it can also occur through eating raw or rare sheep, pork, kangaroo or game meat, as well as offal such as heart, liver, and tongue, or duck and goose paté. Game meat can also be infected by Sarcocystis, which is a close relative of Toxoplasma gondii.

There are three simple ways to reduce your risk of Toxoplasma gondii infection:

1. **Safe pet care.** Toxoplasmosis is transmitted by domestic and feral cat faeces so clean out cat litter trays daily and always wash your hands thoroughly after cleaning. If you are pregnant or immune compromised, get someone else to do this or wear rubber gloves. Don't feed your cat raw red meat and try to keep cats out of areas where you are preparing food, especially kitchen benchtops. As always, wash your hands with soap and dry thoroughly before handling food and after handling your pet, their food or toys. Don't let your pets lick or take food from your plate. Don't wash pet food bowls in with your own dishes; preferably wash them in a separate laundry sink if you have one.
2. **Cook your meat to the safe temperature.** The parasites can reside as cysts (like eggs or seeds) in the muscle tissue of raw or undercooked meats and this is the most common way people get infected. We recommend you use a digital meat thermometer and cook whole pieces of red meat such as lamb, to at least 63°C (medium rare) and leave to rest 3 to 5 minutes. Cook pork whole cuts and pieces to 70°C and roasts to between 70°C and 75°C and leave to rest 3 to 5 minutes. Minced products should be cooked to at least 75°C. The Toxoplasma gondii parasite isn't frequently found in beef or kangaroo meat.
3. **In the garden.** If you grow your own fruit and vegetables, fence or cover your gardens to make sure your pets or wild animals can't poop where you are growing food. You might want to use gloves when gardening in case you come into contact with animal faeces and always wash your hands thoroughly when you have finished. Don't forget to secure and cover children's sandboxes, when they are not in use, to deter cats from using them as makeshift litterboxes.

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