

Helping Your Cat Adjust to a New Home

Adjusting to a new home can be a tense and frightening experience for a cat. Your patience and understanding during the initial period can do a lot to help your new cat feel at home.

The Ride Home

Your cat or kitten should be confined to a carrier during the ride home as well as during subsequent trips to the veterinarian. Do not let your new cat loose in a moving car or allow children to excite your cat. Do not leave the cat unattended in the car or stop to visit friends, shop etc. Keep your cat in his carrier until you are safely inside your home.

The New Home

Consider your companion's past experiences. Your kitten may have recently separated from her mother and litter mates. The kitten or cat has had to cope with the transition of a shelter and maybe the stress of surgery. The adult cat may have been separated from a familiar home and forced to break a bond with human companions or other animals. Now he must adjust again to totally new surroundings. Allow your cat several weeks to adapt. During this period, the cat or kitten should be kept in their own personal space (such as a bathroom or spare bedroom) for at least two weeks. This will allow your feline friend to decompress from shelter stress and get acclimated to their new home. Make sure that in their room, they have access to food, water, a litter box, and any toys or scratching posts you wish to provide. They need to get used to you as the provider of love, shelter and food. Be sure that all windows and doors are kept closed and that all screens are secure. A scared cat can easily get out of a high open window. We strongly advocate keeping cats indoors for their entire lives, as the outdoors can pose many hazards to your cat's wellbeing.

It is not uncommon for cats to display behavior problems during the first days in a new home, but these usually disappear over time. New cats and kittens often bolt under furniture. Some may spend hours or even days hiding. Sit and talk quietly to the cat. If you must take the cat out of her hiding place, carry her gently to a quiet protected area where she will feel secure. Be sure food, water and litter box are nearby.

The First Day

Introduce your cat to his new home gradually, restricting him to one room at first. Isolate other animals from your new cat during this time. Supervise children, advising them to always be gentle with the cat. Have the litter box ready when you remove the cat from the carrier. Show him the location of the litter box. Offer a bowl of water but do not provide food for an hour. Your cat may be bewildered, fearful or curious. Do not overwhelm him with attention or demands. Remember to keep doors and windows closed, be sure the cat has an ID tag on at all times. It is not unusual for cats to leap on top of very high furniture in order to explore or feel secure. Do not panic, shout, or run to the cat. When he is ready, he will come down on his own.

Try to spend several hours with your new cat as he becomes accustomed to your home. Your sensitive handling of the initial transition can ease the trauma and set the stage for a happy settling-in.

Sleeping Arrangements

Most cats choose several favorite sleeping spots where they can be comfortable, warm, and free from drafts. Providing a bed for your cat may discourage him from sleeping on furniture. A cozy box or basket lined with soft, washable bedding placed in a quiet corner makes a suitable cat bed.

Some cats enjoy continually picking new (and sometimes surprising) sleeping spots. If you allow your cat to sleep on furniture, a washable cover can be placed over favorite spots. A cat's sleeping spot should be respected as her own. Don't allow children to disturb your cat when she is resting. Cats need solitude and quiet time.

Introduction to Other Animals

The ability of animals to get along together in the same household depends on their individual personalities. There will always be one who dominates. A new cat will often upset the existing pecking order, or the old cat or dog may feel it necessary to establish dominance immediately. Wise handling of the "getting acquainted" period is an important factor in the successful introduction of a new cat. The first week or two may be hectic, frustrating and time consuming. Be patient. The adjustment will take time.

Birds, rodents, and fish should be adequately protected from possible harassment by the new cat. These animals are the natural prey of cats and may be subjected to stress merely by the presence of a cat. Cats and rabbits generally live harmoniously together, with the rabbit often assuming a Keep your dog confined until your cat feels secure in his new home. Introduce them indoors with the dog under control on a leash. Do not allow the dog to chase or corner the cat, even out of playfulness or curiosity. Supervise them carefully and don't tolerate any aggressive behavior from your dog. The cat should have a safe retreat, either up high or in a room inaccessible to the dog.

An adult cat may swat a dog to set limits. Allow your animals to accept one another in their own time and don't leave them alone until this is accomplished. Never force interaction. Many cats and dogs become companions and playmates while others simply tolerate each other. Be sure to give your dog lots of extra attention to avoid jealous reactions.

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