

Bringing Your New Cat Home

Congratulations!

You are the proud owner of a cat. No doubt you're looking forward to years of happy companionship. But what do you do now? The first thing you should know about your new pet is that most cats hate to travel. For the trip home and all future travels, confine your pet in a sturdy cat carrier.

The First Day: Your new cat has just spent some time living in a cage or foster home, awaiting adoption. She may not be used to large, open spaces and may become scared or overwhelmed if released into large apartment or entire house on her own. Therefore, it is best to keep her confined to one room or a small area to start with. When you arrive home with your new cat, go into the designated room, close the door, and set the carrier down. Open the door, and then remain nearby quietly to see if she will emerge. Don't force her to come out, let her come out on her own time. Some cats may not come out until nighttime. If she does not want to come out right away, make sure the food and water dishes are nearby, as well as the litter box.

The Following Days: As a rule, cats can be upset by changes in their environment. Some cats will adjust more quickly, while others may take weeks or months. You must have the patience and understanding to allow your cat to adjust at her own pace. When you first bring her home, your cat is likely to hide - this is why you need to provide a safe, comfortable place for her to retreat to.

Spend as much time in the room with her as you can, when your cat seems happy to see you and is confident and friendly in her limited environment, it is time to introduce her to the next area. Signs that she may be ready include scratching or meowing at the door and trying to run out when you open the door.

When she feels at home in her own space, then slowly introduce her to other areas, always allowing her access to her original space where she feels comfortable and safe. Even if your cat has decided she wants to explore, she may still be easily frightened by sudden noises or too much open space. Keep your cat's own space set up exactly as it has been, so she has a refuge that is familiar to her. This feeling of familiarity is very important to cats. Cat behaviorists indicate that it takes two months for most cats to become totally at home in their new environment.

Cat to Cat Introductions

Introducing a new cat to your household can be very stressful for both the new cat and your resident cat. The time spent in the introduction process is well worth the effort to create a harmonious relationship for years to come. The behavior of your resident cat may change toward you during this time and the loving behavior of your new cat may not be immediately apparent. Until both cats are ready for a face to face introduction, they should not SEE each other. Be sure to keep them in separate areas behind closed doors.

Create a lovefest: Once your new cat is comfortable with you and her surroundings, you can start the introduction process. One effective way to get your cats accustomed to each other before they meet for the first time is to place a soft sock on your hand like

a glove and gently rub all over your new cat focusing on the areas close to the whiskers, the top of the head, and the base of the tail. These areas release pheromones (happy hormones). Make this exchange of happy hormones a **lovefest** for both you and your cat; use the sock to stroke, play and have fun with each other. The next step is to take the same sock and repeat the process on your resident cat(s). Repeat this process multiple times each day. After several days, the two scents begin to meld;

each cat smells like the other cat and is not recognized as a major threat.

During this time monitor the cats' behavior when they approach the door that separates them, however, do not interfere with this process. Normal cat language would be sniffing, pawing, and even growling. Warning signs would be flattened ears, twitching tail and hissing, if you see any of these warning signs, be patient and continue the lovefest. It usually takes no longer than two weeks for the cats to adjust to each other's presence through the door. After a few days you can also bring the cats closer by putting their feeding bowls on both sides of the door.



Cat to Cat Introductions *continued*

When the cats are no longer showing signs of aggression or even showing positive behaviors such as playing footsies under the door, it may be time for them to meet.

Open the door and let them meet for the first time watching them closely at first. You can expect some hissing, however, if you haven't rushed the process, because you either felt sorry for the isolated newcomer, or you didn't have time to follow through all the steps, your cats should be able to get along.

Continue to confine the newcomer to her original room at night and when you are absent to help her feel more secure.

Cat to Dog Introductions

While dogs and cats have often been portrayed as enemies, it is usually a great deal easier to introduce a new cat to a dog than to another cat. While both animals may be wary of each other initially, they do not see the other as direct competition and can actually get on very well.

If your dog is rather excitable, take it for a walk first to get rid of some of its energy. Keep your dog on the lead and made to sit quietly. The new cat should be given a safe position in the room and allowed to get used to the dog and approach it if she wants. This requires patience and rewards for the dog if it behaves well.

Repeat the introduction process until both animals show no signs of aggression and behave comfortably in each other's presence. **Never** leave the dog and cat together unattended until you are happy they are safe together.

The cat's food will be hugely tempting for any dog, so sit it up and out of the way of thieving canine jaws! Likewise a litter tray can be pretty tempting and should be kept out of reach of the dog if it is likely to snaffle the contents.



Thank you for bringing a cat or kitten home to love.