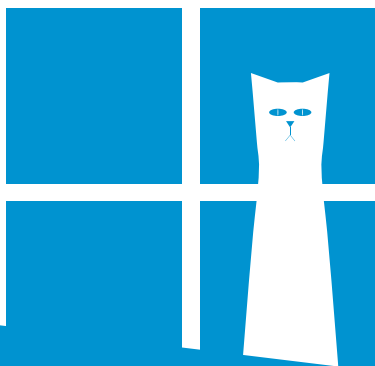


Welcome home



CATS PROTECTION
ESSENTIAL GUIDES



It's time to help your cat or kitten settle into his new home! Following the advice here will help to ensure he soon becomes used to his new surroundings...

Bringing your new cat home

The first few hours after bringing your cat home can really affect how well he accepts his new life. First and foremost, be prepared to be patient and never attempt to rush your cat into doing things he may not be ready for.

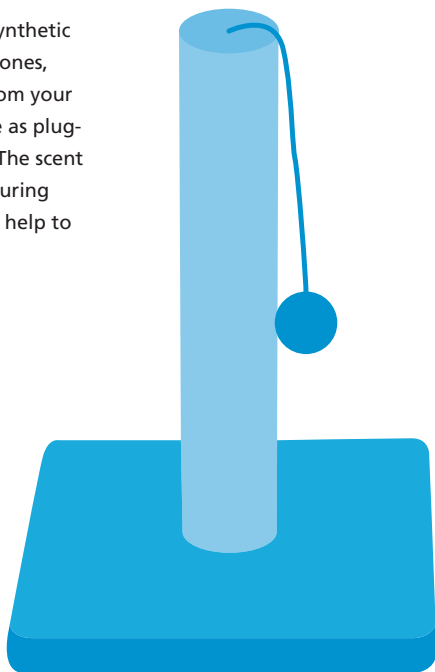
Territory is vital to cats so, before collecting him, set aside a dedicated, secure room. This area should include:

- a few toys and space for him to play
- an area for food and water
- at least one litter tray placed as far away as possible from his food and water and in a private location, if possible
- a suitable place to sleep or, ideally, a choice of them
- a scratching post
- somewhere to hide – an upturned cardboard box with a hole in the side, an enclosed igloo bed, or simply a space under a bed
- somewhere to observe – cats feel more relaxed if they can look out from a height so make use of shelves or a chest of drawers

The significance of scent

Cats rely heavily on their sense of smell and will settle quicker if their new home smells familiar. To help your cat get used to your scent, take an item of clothing or a blanket from your home and leave it with the cat for a few days before you bring him home. When you pick your cat up, bring the same item back – by now it will have a mixture of his and your scent on it. Put it in a sealed plastic bag to keep the scent fresh while transporting and keep the bag well away from your cat.

You could also use a synthetic form of facial pheromones, which are available from your vet. They are available as plug-in diffusers or sprays. The scent helps to create a reassuring environment and may help to reduce stress.



The first steps

How your cat reacts to being in a strange environment among strange people will depend entirely on his character. The following is a guide to introducing your cat to his new home and family. Take one step at a time and be patient. Only you can judge whether your cat is comfortable enough to move onto the next stage.

When you arrive home, leave your cat alone to explore his room for an hour or so before going in. When you do go in to see him, get down to his level, put out your hand and call his name. Let him come to you.

If your cat chooses to hide, just sit with him and talk gently in low tones. Do not force him to come out. Give him plenty of time to adjust and continue to visit him so he can get used to your presence. As long as he is eating and using the litter tray there is no cause for alarm. If your cat is very timid he may not want to come out to eat. In this case, try moving the food bowl closer to his hiding place and leaving the room.

You may want to try offering a treat or using a toy to tempt your cat from his hiding place. Play is a good bonding tool because it is less intimidating than physical contact, relieves stress and provides an outlet for pent-up energy. You may find it is easier to encourage play at dawn and dusk when cats are naturally more active.

Some cats may not have had much contact with people, or may have previously had bad experiences so be patient – your cat will gain confidence with time.

The first steps – kittens

The process is slightly different with a kitten. It is best not to leave him alone until he has settled. Provide him with a warm, secure bed at ground level – a cardboard box will do. Once he has had a look around, show him where his litter tray, bowls and bed are. He may feel a bit lonely if he is used to living with his mother and siblings, so when you are not there, a soft toy or low-volume radio will help to keep him company.

Meeting the family

Once your cat seems confident with you, introduce other family members, one by one. Children are likely to be excited about the new arrival, but try and keep them calm. Let the cat come to them and when he does, show the children the correct way to handle and stroke him. Make sure they understand he is not a toy.

Meeting the family – kittens

Kittens are particularly delicate and, just like babies, need lots of sleep. Make sure your kitten is handled carefully and gets plenty of time to rest.

Exploring the rest of the house

Once your cat is comfortable with all the members of the family, and if you have no other pets in the house, you can gradually let him explore more rooms. Let your cat come out of his room of his own accord and keep the door open so he can dash back to his refuge. Make sure all doors and windows are shut so he cannot escape outside.

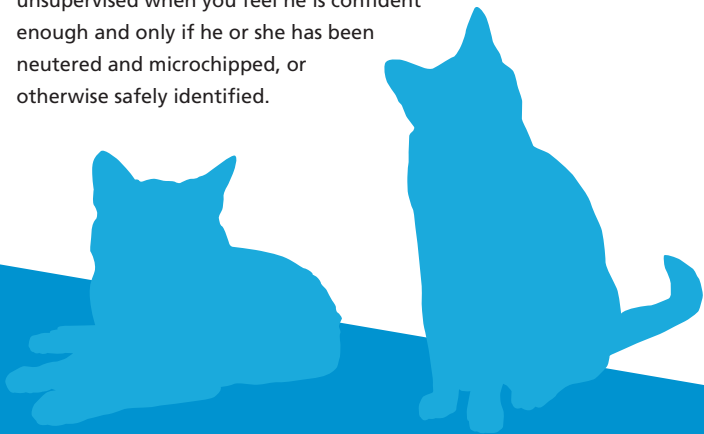
The big outdoors

Do not let your cat go outside until he has fully adjusted to his new home and knows where his food will be coming from – this should take between three and four weeks. If your cat has not been neutered, do not let him or her out until the operation has been performed by your vet. Letting him out before his dinner or breakfast time will ensure he does not wander too far.

The big outdoors – kittens

Your kitten needs to gain experience of the outside world if he is going to feel comfortable in your garden when he is an adult. You will notice when your kitten becomes interested in going outside. His character and confidence will determine when this happens. Calling to him may encourage him to go outside but never force the issue.

Do not let your kitten out in the garden unaccompanied until he is at least six months old. You should only let your kitten out unsupervised when you feel he is confident enough and only if he or she has been neutered and microchipped, or otherwise safely identified.



Introducing other pets

When introducing your new cat to other pets, it is much better to control the situation rather than leave the animals to sort it out for themselves.

Introducing cats to cats

Cats are not naturally social creatures and most will function happily on their own, so do not expect instant harmony. However, if there is no competition for food or sleeping places, cats will usually tolerate each other and can become good friends.

Before introducing the cats physically, introduce them to each other's scent. Mix and spread scents by:

- stroking each cat in turn without washing your hands
- stroking them with a soft cloth and dabbing it around your home and furniture
- swapping the cats' bedding or favourite blankets

Keep mixing scents until the cats have stopped reacting to the smell.

When it is time to introduce your cats face to face, it helps to:

- ensure easy escape routes are available for both cats
- start in a fairly large room where they can stay at a distance from each other
- only introduce for short periods of time before returning the cats to separate rooms
- gradually increase the time they spend together over several days

Your cats are unlikely to fight but have a blanket ready so you can separate them, just in case. Do not chase or shout at the cats as this will only lead to them associating each other with bad things.

As they become more comfortable in each other's company, try giving them titbits to encourage them to come closer. Finally, try feeding them in the same room with their bowls far apart. Choose somewhere where they can escape behind furniture or up high. Placing an object such as a chair between the feeding bowls may help them feel less threatened. Over time you can move the bowls closer together.

It can take anything from a day to several weeks for cats to tolerate each other so do not give up if there is some initial hissing and spitting. It is amazing how a cold, wet day outside will force rivals together in front of the fire!

Introducing cats to dogs

While dogs and cats are often regarded as enemies, it is usually easier to introduce a new cat to a dog than to another cat. The cat will often take charge of the situation immediately!

First exchange the dog's and cat's scent in the same way as above over a period of several days. Then, when making face-to-face introductions:

- keep your dog on the lead and keep him calm – it may help to take your dog for a vigorous walk first
- ensure your cat does not feel cornered, he should be somewhere where he feels relaxed with a safe escape route



- do not force the cat to approach the dog – let him choose to come over
- do not allow your dog to chase your cat if he runs away – praise and treat the dog for remaining calm
- give your cat a treat so he associates the dog with something positive

When your cat and dog are unconcerned with each other's presence you can take your dog off the lead, but make sure your cat can escape onto high ledges or furniture. Never leave the dog and cat together unattended until you are absolutely sure they are happy and secure in each other's company.

Introducing a kitten

When introducing a kitten to a cat or dog be very cautious and take each stage very slowly. The same process of frequent and controlled meetings applies. It is best to keep the kitten in a carrier or pen during the first few introductions until both animals are completely happy.

Stress

A new home can be very stressful for both the new cat and any existing cats. A cat may demonstrate stress by scratching or spraying. These problems can be avoided by being patient and attentive to your cats' needs. Offering enough places for each cat to be able to sleep, eat, and go to the toilet in peace, as well as providing safe hiding places will mean that your cats can maintain a sense of control over their world. For more details on scratching and spraying and how to deal with it, see Cats Protection's [Veterinary Guide: Spraying and scratching](#).

Sometimes stress can suppress a cat's immune system. A cat may suffer from diarrhoea or show signs of respiratory infection as a result. If severe, or if signs do not improve, visit your vet.

Diet

Initially, you should follow the diet that your cat has been fed previously, so before you take him home, find out what he has been eating and at what times. It is best not to feed your cat cow's milk as some cats cannot tolerate the lactose. Always have a supply of water available too.

More information about feeding cats and kittens, and what to do if your cat stops eating, is available in Cats Protection's [Essential Guide: Feeding](#).



New cat checklist

Now that your new cat has settled in, do not forget to:

- register your new cat with your vet
- get pet insurance – it will cover any unexpected veterinary bills if they occur
- get identification for your cat – microchipping is the best form. This can be done when you register your cat at the vet. If your cat is already microchipped when you get him, make sure you change his home address registration details to your own. If you must use a collar, only use a quick-release model
- vaccinate your cat – your vet can advise on the vaccinations your cat will need. Kittens will need a set of vaccinations – usually at nine and twelve weeks old. Adult cats will need booster vaccinations once a year for life
- regularly treat your cat for fleas and worms – the most effective treatments are available from your vet and can come in pill, powder, spray or spot-on forms
- get your new cat neutered – your vet will advise on the best time to do this

For further information on caring for your cat and the benefits of neutering, see Cats Protection's [Essential Guide: Caring for your cat](#) and [Essential Guide: Neutering](#).

This leaflet is one of a range provided by
Cats Protection on issues surrounding cat care.

Cats Protection is the UK's leading feline welfare
charity and helps more than 193,000 cats and kittens
each year. We rely entirely on public generosity to
finance this vital welfare work.

For more information on **adopting a cat**,
volunteering for us or **making a donation**,
visit **www.cats.org.uk**



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