

Ask the vets+++

Have you got a question?

Send your questions to:

'Ask The Vets', *The Cat* magazine, National Cat Centre, Chelwood Gate, Haywards Heath, RH17 7TT or email: editorial@cats.org.uk

CP's team of veterinary experts tackle your feline-related questions...



Q My wife has got a new job abroad and so we're looking to move our entire family, including our two cats, early next year. We're beginning the research into how to make this as easy and pain free as possible for all concerned. However, our cats have never been good at travelling, even in the car to the vet. My brother suggested that we get them some pills for the journey to calm them down and I was wondering what kind were available? They're going to have a long time in the plane with all that noise and I know they'll be distressed.

Jim Davies, Manchester

A A move is always a stressful and worrying time and it's important to try and minimise that for both you and the cats.

Firstly, have a chat with your vet about the nature of the journey and how your cats are likely to adapt to the new environment and climate if this is likely to change. Dependent on this discussion about your cats' health and temperament, you may decide that taking them abroad may not be in their best interests and perhaps look at rehoming options instead.

However, if all goes to plan, regarding the journey it would be worth consulting with your vet about the types of travel sickness medication available for cats. She/he will also be able to discuss the possible use of sedatives but be aware that this is not always advisable. If travelling by air, it's worth checking with your airline about this too. They'll also be able to tell you about their process of transporting pets and they can answer any specific questions you may have. The Live Animals Transportation by Air website (www.iata.org) sets the standards for transporting animals by commercial airlines and might give further information and advice on air travel.

As you will be moving to another country it is extremely important that you comply with the Pet Travel Scheme requirements. Again, your vet can assist you with the paperwork and we would also recommend contacting the Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) PETS helpline on 0870 241 1710 for more information about the Scheme or look at their website on: www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-pets/pets/travel/

There are pet courier companies whose staff are experienced in transporting pets and can organise your cats' journey for you.

On to the actual journey! It's always a good idea to get your cats used to being in a carrier for something other than just going to the vets. Let your cat become accustomed to the carrier or travel crate well before the journey. Try and make it a pleasant place to be – try feeding them cat biscuits inside it and make a bed from familiar smelling bedding which

can be used on the journey. Try leaving the cage door open and allow free movement in and out and eventually they may even be happy to have a little sleep in it! Then, when it comes to the actual journey, the cat is at least familiar with its immediate environment, which will hopefully make the experience a little less stressful.

As you have more than one cat it may be better to give them separate carriers to allow better air flow, more room and less chance of overheating. Also being in the same carrier may be a bit of a strain on your cats' friendship and may lead to disagreements!

Prior to the journey withhold food for about four to five hours before the journey in case the cat is sick while travelling – obviously this is an approximate time frame and should be discussed with your vet as your cats may have different requirements. Offer water up to the time you leave and again during the journey if possible. You may be able to get special non-spill bowls that attach to the cage.

If your cats do not normally wear collars it may be a good idea for them to get used to wearing a quick-release collar with their new address on prior to the journey. Also, investigate re-registering your cats' microchip details in the country of destination, before you go – your cat's current microchip database should be able to help.

On reaching your final destination, keep your cats in one designated room, which is secure and comfortable, and ensure they are surrounded by familiar smells on furniture and bedding. Offer them water and some food and settle them into their new environment. Do not allow the cats to go out for at least a week and ensure they are identifiable if lost. It would be a good idea to let your cats out initially perhaps just prior to feeding times as they will hopefully be less likely to roam too far.

Finally, don't forget to investigate whether you can update/transfer your pet's insurance cover to the country of destination and register your cat with a new vet as soon as you can. Also remember recommendations for basic care such as parasite control and vaccination may vary in different countries, dependent on the types of feline diseases present in those countries.

Q I have four indoor cats, a mother, Whiskey and her two kittens, Bramble and Poppy. They have a secure back garden with cat-proof fencing which they have access to all day as we're not always home until the evening. A while back Bramble had to go in for a few days to the vet for an operation. When he came back, Poppy suddenly attacked him. The attacks were so ferocious and constant we have to

keep them separated. Thankfully he was able to remain with his mother who still got on with him.

This is causing great problems at home as they are house cats and we have to keep them apart.

Mrs E Downey, Truro

A We are sorry to hear of your current situation, it must have been a shock to see Bramble attacked by Poppy.

In the wild, cats are not social and they function happily on their own without a social structure around them and domesticated cats still have this inherent solitary blueprint. However, there are situations where cats can form close bonds and live together in harmony, such as cats in some feral colonies, often where the colony consists of related individuals, or between particular individuals in a multi-cat household such as yours. Behaviours such as grooming each other, rubbing against each other and sleeping together touching are signs that cats are in the same social group.

Scent is the most important of the cat's senses in terms of communication and well-being. You may have seen your cats rubbing up against each other to exchange their scents and this eventually results in a mixed scent or communal scent that is familiar to all cats in that group. The cats will use this scent to identify the members of their group. If one cat in that group is taken away for a period of time, the scent will gradually fade and be replaced with new smells, perhaps transferred from Bramble's time at the veterinary practice, that will not be recognised the next time the rest of the group meet him. This can result in rejection from the group, as seems to have happened in this case.

Therefore, we would suggest that you try to reintroduce Bramble as if he were a new cat to the household. In the initial stages, it is best to keep both cats in separate areas of the house as you are already doing. However, if you are not already, it would help to have a room in which you can have all the cats but at different times. The cats can be moved from room to room and petted, fed and played with in these areas. This means that scent signals tell each cat that another is around, but that there is no direct threat to the incoming kitten.

After a week or so, depending on the cats' reactions to each other's scent, you can start to mix and spread scents by stroking each cat in turn with a soft cloth. Gather scents from around the cats' heads by gently stroking them then dab it around your home and furniture. This will effectively mingle their individual scents to begin the process of producing the mixed scent, where all members of the same household smell alike. Additionally, vets can supply a product containing a synthetic form of the facial pheromones. This creates a reassuring environment for the cats and may help with the integration (www.feliway.uk.com).

The next step would be for the cats to see each other but not be able to get to each other, such as seeing one another through a glass or mesh door. This will allow Poppy to smell Bramble through the mesh. You can use biscuits to encourage the cats to stay near each other and accept the other's presence, making it a positive experience. You want the cats to associate each other with pleasant happenings, not shouting or chasing.

Introductions like this should be short and sweet. A few minutes' controlled exposure, several times a day as you can manage, is far better than long periods. After this time, or when you cannot supervise them fully, the cats should be put back in separate rooms.

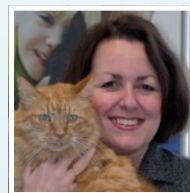
Watch both cats' body language closely while an introduction is going on and note when they appear to become more relaxed in each other's presence. At this stage you can start to feed the cats at opposite ends of the room. When it is time to introduce your cats, ensure that easy escape routes are available for all cats where they won't have to run past each other.

After this, only time and patience will tell if your ground work has paid off.

Character differences play a great part in all social interactions and resulting friendships, and cats are certainly no exception to this rule.

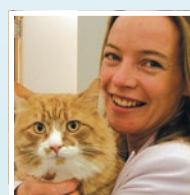
Good luck with the re-introduction and we hope Bramble and Poppy get back on good terms soon.

THE EXPERTS



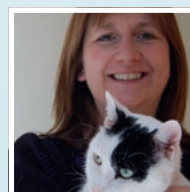
Maggie Roberts BVM&S MRCVS

After qualifying at Edinburgh University in 1986, Maggie went on to work primarily in private practice. Maggie first worked for CP as Veterinary Officer from 1997-99; her interest in feline medicine brought her back to the charity as Head of Veterinary Services in 2006. She has three cats, Trevor, Frankie and Ronnie.



Beth Skillings BVSc MRCVS

Beth qualified at the University of Liverpool in 1998 and went on to work in general veterinary practice until 2005 when she joined CP as Head of Veterinary Services. Beth moved into a new role as Clinical Veterinary Officer in November 2006. Beth has two CP cats, Starsky and Vincent.



Lisa Morrow BMLSc DVM MSc(BE) MRCVS

Lisa graduated from the Ontario Veterinary College at the University of Guelph, Canada in 2000. Lisa first worked with CP as an Adoption Centre Vet at Derby Adoption Centre and was CP Head of Veterinary Services from 2003-2005. Lisa recently rejoined CP as Field Veterinary Officer in the northern region of the UK. She has two elderly cats called Ginger and Skinnie Minnie.



Karen Hiestand BVSc MRCVS

Karen graduated from Massey University in New Zealand in 2001 and spent two years in mixed practise in her home country. Since then, she has interspersed locumming around the UK with volunteer veterinary work. She has one cat called Dexter.

Our veterinary surgeons have provided the advice on these pages, but for specific cases and health concerns it is important that you consult your own vet who will be able to look at your cat's history and do a clinical examination.