

Bringing your cat home

cats.org.uk



Congratulations on your new cat or kitten. It's the start of a wonderful relationship but we know that you both may be anxious as you get used to each other, and your cat adapts to a new home.

Any kind of change can be stressful for cats and you will need to help them gently settle into their new surroundings to make them feel safe and at ease. It will take a few weeks for them to feel more relaxed and this advice will help them to successfully adapt.

Bringing your new cat home

The first few hours after bringing your cat home can affect how well they settle into their new surroundings. Always go at their pace, be patient and don't rush them.

They will need their own quiet place so set aside a dedicated, escape-proof room before you collect them. This room should include:

- separate food and water bowls placed away from each other (cats don't like their water contaminated by their food)
- at least one litter tray. Place it as far away as possible from their food and water and in a private, easy-to-access location
- somewhere to hide, such as a cardboard box
- access to a high spot where they can view their surroundings
- a suitable, comfortable place to sleep or, ideally, a choice of them
- a scratching post
- a few cat toys and space for them to play

Find out more: cats.org.uk/bringing-a-cat-home

The importance 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 collect them. When you pick your cat up, bring the same item back. It should fit comfortably in their carrier with them and then it can be placed in their room.

Your cat has glands on their face and head that produce pheromones. These are scented chemicals that act as a communication system for cats. Rubbing their scent onto you, or objects around them, marks them as familiar. The smell also tells the cat they are in a safe place. There is a man-made version of these chemicals, which comes as a plug-in diffuser or spray, such as FELIWAY®. This helps make a new place or situation feel more familiar and safe for cats, reassuring them and reducing their stress.

Visit cats.org.uk/shop/other-ways-to-help/ceva for more information.

Travelling home

Cats are territorial and creatures of habit so travelling can be stressful for them. To help your cat stay calm during journeys, put a blanket that smells familiar to them inside their carrier and cover the carrier with another light blanket. Spraying the inside of the carrier with a pheromone spray will help create a feeling of familiarity and security. Use the spray at least 15 minutes before your cat uses the carrier. For your cat's safety it's important to use a strong, secure and easily cleanable carrier. The carrier should be large enough for your cat to stand up and lay down comfortably in, as well as adjust their position easily.

The first steps

Now it's time to introduce your cat to their new home and family. Take one step at a time, be patient and always work at your cat's pace before moving onto the next stage.

When you arrive home:

- leave your cat alone to explore their room for an hour or so before introducing yourself. Some cats may need longer

- when you go in to see them, get down to their level, put out your hand and call their name softly, let them come to you

If your cat chooses to hide:

- just sit quietly in the same room, occasionally talk to them gently in low tones
- do not force them to come out. If they don't come out of their hiding place after a few minutes, leave the room
- give them plenty of time to adjust and continue to visit them so they can get used to your presence
- if your cat is very timid, they may not want to come out to eat. Try moving the food bowl closer to their hiding place and leave the room
- if they are eating and using the litter tray, there should be no cause for alarm
- to tempt them from their hiding place try offering a small treat or using a toy such as a fishing rod toy with feathers on the end

Playing with your cat helps you to bond with them. They find it less intimidating than being touched. It also helps reduce stress, provides mental stimulation and gives them an outlet for their pent-up energy. It may be easier to encourage play at dawn and dusk when cats are naturally more active.

Many cats don't like being picked up, so in the early stages, wait until they have settled in and they know you are not a threat.

Kittens

The first steps

With a kitten, the process is slightly different as it is best not to leave them alone until they have settled. Provide them with a warm, secure bed at ground level. A cardboard box will do. Once they've had a look around, show them where their litter tray, bowls and bed are by gently tapping these items. They may feel a little unsettled if they were used to living with their mother and siblings. When you are not there, a soft toy or low-volume radio might help them feel at ease.

Find out more: cats.org.uk/kittens

Meeting the family

Once your cat seems confident with you, introduce other human family members one by one. Children will be excited about the new arrival, but it is important to keep them calm. Let the cat come to them and when they do, show them the correct way to gently stroke and interact with the cat. Children, particularly young children with little experience of cats, need to learn how to treat cats properly.

Even the friendliest cat will defend themselves if they are pushed or pulled too much. Make sure children understand the cat is not a toy.

Find out more: cats.org.uk/meeting-other-people

Kittens are particularly delicate and, just like babies, they need lots of sleep. Make sure your kitten is handled carefully and gets plenty of time to rest. Provide a room or area in the house that is out of bounds to children where your kitten can be undisturbed.

Find out more: cats.org.uk/kittens

Some cats may not have had much contact with people, or may have had bad experiences in the past, so be patient. Not all cats will become lap cats.

Exploring the rest of the house

Once your cat is comfortable in their space (and if you have no other pets in the house) you can gradually let them explore more rooms. It may help to gently wipe your cat's cheeks with a soft cloth, to pick up their facial pheromones. Rub this around points in the house at cat height to make the house smell more familiar. Let your cat come out of their room of their own accord and keep the door open so they can dash back if they want to. Remember to shut all external doors and windows so they can't escape outside.

Going outside

Most importantly make sure your cat or kitten has been neutered, vaccinated and microchipped before letting them outside.

First:

- allow them to fully adjust to their new home, laying their scent and marking it a safe place for them. This usually takes between three and four weeks

When ready:

- practice calling their name or creating signals such as whistles within the house and reward them with a small treat when they come to you.

This way your cat will learn to associate those sounds with returning to you when they are close

- if they're showing signs of wanting to go out such as leading you to the door, try letting them out before a meal so they will be more likely to return for food when being called
- you can step outside first and let them join you. Keep the door open so they can go back inside if they feel fearful. Kittens should always be supervised when outdoors

Find out more: cats.org.uk/garden-and-outdoors

Introducing other pets

You may well have other pets already in your house. When introducing your new cat to them, it is much better to control the situation, never leave the animals to sort it out for themselves. First impressions are very important and a negative start may lead to lifelong conflict.

Introducing cats

Cats aren't naturally social animals and most are quite happy on their own. Cats who are bonded to each other will groom each other, sleep touching each other or choose to share things such as food bowls or a litter tray.

Most cats want to keep other cats out of their protected territory, so a new cat can be stressful. Many cats will never fully bond with another cat, but if there is no competition for food or sleeping places, cats will usually learn to tolerate each other and can live together harmoniously and form a social group.

Introductions can take time, so be patient and don't miss out on any of the steps.

Step one: swapping scents

We've already spoken about the importance of scent to cats. Before introducing your established cat to your new cat face to face, introduce them to each other's scent so they can become familiar with it.

- Take two clean cloths
- Stroke each cat gently around the face with a clean, soft cloth
- Dab the cloths around your home and furniture
- Put the cloth in the other cat's designated area to sniff when they are ready to investigate
- Keep swapping the scents until the cats show no reaction to the smell. If the cats avoid the scent cloth then give the scent swapping stage more time

Step two: seeing each other

- Allow the cats to see each other while not being able to touch or meet one another
- If possible, place a glass or mesh door between the cats and allow each cat to approach or hide as they choose
- Don't attempt a face-to-face introduction until the cats either ignore each other or show positive signs such as attempting to groom or rub heads through the divider

Step three: face to face

- Ensure easy escape routes are available for both cats, as well as easy access to places higher up, such as furniture or shelves
- Start in a fairly large room where they can stay at a distance from each other
- Supervise the cats when they are together
- Work at a pace that the cats are comfortable with and go back a step if necessary
- Only introduce for short periods of time during feeding time. This helps form positive associations with each other. Then return the cats to separate rooms
- Gradually start to fuss or play with the cats for a short time, so their attention is on you, before putting the food down

If all the above goes well, then gradually increase the time they spend together.

It can take anything from a day to many weeks for cats to tolerate each other. If there are signs of conflict such as unbroken stares, hunched body posture, or vocalisation, go back a step. They are unlikely to fight, but ensure they can both flee to a safe space at all times. Take care not to touch the cats to avoid being bitten or scratched as the cats may be overstimulated. Don't chase or shout at them as this will only lead to them associating each other with bad things.

Living together

Providing plenty of essentials is important for cats living together, such as places to:

- eat
- drink
- toilet
- rest
- hide
- exit and entry points

Cats are happier when they have control over when they interact with each other. Limited essential places can lead to conflict and stress.

If your cats are apart for any reason, for example if one has to stay at a boarding cattery or the vets, this may affect their scent and recognition of each other. They may not be remembered as part of the same social group when they return. The longer a cat is away, the harder it can be to reintegrate. On return, it's a good idea to keep the cats apart, so the absent cat can pick up the smells of home. Then slowly reintroduce them. Consider where you place things such as food bowls and litter trays, keeping them apart so they can both use them easily and away from each other.

By taking these simple steps you can often dramatically improve the quality of life for the cats living in your home.

If you have problems, please seek help sooner rather than later. It may be easier to resolve a recently developed problem, than one which has occurred for some time.

If cats have been introduced too quickly, you may need to give them separate rooms and start the introduction from scratch. Speak with your vet for further advice. They may recommend referral to a suitably qualified behaviourist, such as a member of the Animal Behaviour and Training Council.

Find out more: cats.org.uk/other-cats and cats.org.uk/behaviour

Introducing cats to dogs

Dogs and cats are not thought to get on. However it is usually easier to introduce a new cat to a dog than to another cat. A gradual introduction can make all the difference. It can be easier if the cat had positive experiences with dogs when they were a young kitten and vice versa.

First step

- Provide a room or area of the house for your cat that your dog can't get into
- Exchange the dog's and cat's scents, in the same way as detailed in the 'Introducing cats' section above, over a period of several days

Step two: face to face

- Keep your dog on the lead and keep them calm. It may help to take your dog for a vigorous walk first

- Train your dog to show relaxed, non-threatening behaviour around the cat, such as 'down' and 'stay' and ensure you are in control at all times. For more information on positive, reward-based dog-training, contact the Association of Pet Dog Trainers apdt.co.uk
- Ensure your cat doesn't feel cornered. They should be somewhere where they feel relaxed with a safe escape route, preferably a high ledge where the dog can't reach them
- Ensure external doors and windows are kept closed to avoid the cat bolting
- Ignore the cat. Your dog will feel the cat is more important if you are focused on them
- Do some training tasks with your dog to keep their attention, using treats and praise to reward good behaviour
- Never restrain the cat or force them to approach the dog. Let your cat leave the room whenever they wish
- Don't allow your dog to give chase if the cat runs away. Praise and treat the dog if they remain calm and then return the cat back to their own room

- Repeat short introductions until the dog shows little or no interest and the cat is not fearful of the dog. Progress to the dog being on a long lead which can be picked up if necessary
- Give your cat treats so they associate the dog with something positive

Once your cat and dog are unconcerned with each other's presence you can take your dog off the lead. Make sure your cat can always 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.

Remember that cat food and litter trays can be appealing for dogs, so ensure your dog can't get to them. This allows your cat to eat and toilet in peace.

Find out more: cats.org.uk/dogs-and-other-pets

The following vet-approved guides are available to download from cats.org.uk/information-leaflets

Essential guides

Behaviour: Understanding your cat's behaviour W84009

Behaviour: Managing your cat's behaviour W84010

Bringing your cat home W84002

Caring for your cat W84001

Caring for your kitten W84015

Cats and people W84014

Cats living together W84011

Elderly cats W84016

End-of-life, grief and loss
W84007

Feeding and obesity W84004

Feral cats W84017

Indoor and outdoor cats W84012

Keeping your cat safe W84005

Microchipping W84008

Moving home W84003

Neutering W84006

Pregnant cats, birth and care of young kittens W84018

Veterinary guides

Arthritis W83201

Cat flu W83216

Digestive disorders: vomiting and diarrhoea W83218

Feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and feline leukaemia virus (FeLV) W83209

Feline lower urinary tract disease (FLUTD) W83202

Fleas and other parasites
W83215

Heart murmurs and heart disease W83211

Hyperthyroidism W83212

Infectious disease and vaccination W83217

Kidney or renal disease W83206

Skin disorders W83204

Teeth and oral health W83214

Please see cats.org.uk for more information on:

Cats and pregnant women: toxoplasmosis

Cats and the law

Cats with disabilities

Diabetes

Feline asthma

Feline coronavirus (FCoV) and feline infectious peritonitis (FIP)

Feline parvovirus (FPV)

Hypertension

You and your vet

For more information about Cats Protection or to find out how you can support us, go to **cats.org.uk**



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