

Bringing a New Cat Home

Congratulations on your adoption of a new companion! Your friend will be with you a very long time if you keep them safe and work with your vet to keep them healthy.

Ensure you have all your supplies ready for your new addition. You will need cat food, cat litter, a litterbox, food and water dishes and toys. Set up a spare room or bedroom for the cat so they are not overwhelmed by the changes in their life. Cats feel secure with familiar people and surroundings and are likely to hide in a new home even if they are very friendly. Think of it as being transported to another planet. You would probably want to hide as well until you knew the inhabitants were friendly. There should be a controlled space for the cat to hide, to ensure you can find them, and a door that closes. You will be visiting your cat in their room for as long as it takes for them to become comfortable and confident around you. You can tell your cat is ready to explore when they walk with their tail held high, their ears forward and respond by seeking you out when you enter the room. When they are ready for the next step, close the door to the basement and allow them to explore the main levels of your home while you supervise. When they are accustomed to their expanded environment and come when you call them, you can allow them more freedom to explore other areas of the home.

Introducing your new cat to resident cats/dogs

Cats identify each other by scent. When a new cat, with an unknown “smell” comes into the home, they are considered an intruder. Ensuring your new cat smells like your home goes a long way toward acceptance by resident cats. Slower introductions are more successful than ones that are hurried. Start out by placing food, water and litterbox for your new cat in a smaller room (bedroom, office, spare room). Your new cat will not know where they are, and cats feel safer in smaller spaces. Ensure there are no holes in walls, vents are covered, windows are secured, and you have “controlled” hiding spaces for him/her. Providing a box, kennel or piece of furniture they can hide in, or under, ensures they feel safe.

Do not free-feed the cat. By providing meals throughout the day, they will learn to equate you with food and will eventually come out on their own when they know it's mealtime. Do provide your new cat with toys, soft bedding and treats like catnip. Some cats take time to adjust, while others act like they have always lived in your home. Play it by ear and watch them for cues.

After your new cat has slept on the blanket you have provided, bring the blanket out for your resident cats to check out and sleep on. Bring in a blanket your resident cat has slept on for your new cat to check out and sleep on. Once your new cat is confident with you and its new surroundings, let your resident cat in to meet the new cat in the new cat's room, under supervision. Having an item to play with, such as a wand toy or laser pointer can get both cats playing together.

If all goes well, in the safe room place your new cat in a cat carrier or small wire dog kennel and put them in the middle of a room where your resident cats are. They will get the opportunity to meet each other without being able to hurt each other should either of them become afraid or aggressive. If they are calm with each other, let the new cat out to explore, while you supervise. Your own anxiety can also affect acceptance of each other. The more relaxed you are about their introductions, the less stressed the cats will feel. This entire process should take at least two weeks and up to two months. If a scuffle should happen, you can back the process up and take longer to introduce them. Again, slower is better.

Cats should be introduced to dogs via a barrier like a baby gate with a gap underneath that will allow a cat the option to get back into the room quickly if they don't feel safe around the dog or have had enough interaction. Dogs should know commands and follow through with sit, stay. Having a dog on a leash, or in a kennel, to allow the cat to approach the dog rather than the dog to approach the cat is preferable. Muzzle the dog if they bark excessively or tend to mouth objects. Again, slower intros are better.

Health Tips

VET CARE

Your cat will need a veterinarian. Most people take their cats to clinics close to their home. Contact a clinic near you to see if they are accepting new clients. You can schedule your cat's first appointment for a checkup when their vaccine booster is due (or sooner, if they have any health concerns).

There are many kinds of vaccines available for cats. Different vets have varying opinions and protocols on which ones should be given. Vaccines are incredibly important for avoidable conditions like feline panleukopenia (aka feline parvo or distemper). This is a deadly condition that even indoor-only cats can acquire from the transport of virus particles on clothing or shoes.

We DO NOT recommend the FIV vaccine. This vaccine has largely fallen out of favour. FIV is a very manageable condition, and cats often live a long life free from illness. Once a cat is vaccinated with this vaccine, they will test positive for the virus for the rest of their lives. Only special tests can differentiate between a vaccinated cat and a cat that has the condition. This may result in loss of life at the hands of shelters or rescues that are unaware of the relatively benign nature of FIV.

We do not recommend the Feline Leukemia vaccine unless the cat is living with a cat with Feline Leukemia or is an outdoor cat. Feline Leukemia virus dies quickly in the environment and isn't a threat unless cats are repeatedly in contact with one another.

Rabies vaccines are available as 3 year or one-year varieties. Vaccines WITHOUT adjuvant carry a lower risk of adverse reactions.

FVRCP/HCP vaccines are now recommended to be boosted on a 3-year schedule rather than yearly. The schedule for FVRCP/HCP is: (adult cat) initial vaccine, a booster 21-30 days later and another booster a year later, follow-up boosters every three years thereafter.

We also recommend vaccines be given as low as possible on a limb in the event of an injection site sarcoma and one vaccine at a time so the cat can be monitored for an allergic reaction and a note can be made regarding which vaccine caused it.

ILLNESS

Always watch for signs of illness in your cat. Not eating as much as usual, not drinking, lethargy, vomiting and diarrhea that does not resolve in a day or two should all be investigated by your vet. Your cat may have a fever or some type of infection brewing. Keep tabs on how much your cat drinks and note any increase in intake or urine output. Either of those can signal diabetes, hyperthyroidism or kidney conditions. Often seen in addition to thirst and increased output is constant hunger, weight-loss, nausea and vomiting and coat changes. Having your cat examined by a vet yearly, will go a long way to discovering any condition that is completely treatable sooner rather than later.

ALLERGIES

If you are planning on introducing new foods to the cat's diet, try one food at a time. Many cats are allergic to different foods, and it is difficult to know what the culprit was if too many foods are fed in a short period of time. Each new food should be given for at least a week before deciding if it should become part of the rotation. Signs of an allergy can be vomiting, hair loss, and itching. Remember, cats like variety just like we do, so feeding different flavours of different brands of canned food will keep them interested in mealtime. Changing their dry food (if they eat dry) abruptly can cause stomach upset and should be added to their old food gradually.

Cat/Kitten-proofing your home

PLANTS

Plants are lovely to look at and have in the home, but sometimes, they are deadly for pets. For cats, lilies are the deadliest plants. In particular, the Easter Lily will cause instant renal failure if any part of the plant is ingested. Because all lilies are poisonous to cats, it is recommended they not be allowed in the home. The leaves look like grass to cats, and they will often snack on them, to their demise. The complete listing of toxic and non-toxic plants can be found at:

<http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/toxic-and-non-toxic-plants>

LAUNDRY DANGERS

Washing and drying clothes are often done without much thought, but when you have a kitten, or cat, care must be taken to ensure they do not play in, and around, the laundry pair. If possible, keep cats and kittens out of the laundry room altogether. If that is not possible, ensure you have eyes on your cat or kitten BEFORE you close the washer, or dryer, door. Sadly, kittens and cats have been injured, or killed, in preventable accidents when a washer, or dryer, door was left open, and the operator turned their attention to something else and then closed the door and started the machine without realizing their pet had gotten in while their back was turned. Never dump a hamper into a top-load machine. Kittens often sleep in laundry hampers and baskets. Sort items first.

MEDICATION

NEVER give human medications to a cat. Many of our over-the-counter medications can kill a cat instantly. Ensure than any medications in the home are in containers in areas where cats can't get into. Never carry loose pills in a pocket or purse.

ACCIDENTAL INGESTION OF FOREIGN OBJECTS

Cats' tongues have tiny barbs that point to the back of their throat. Anything that winds up on the tongue that they can't shake off, will be ingested. Some cats don't just play with small objects, they eat them, so have a look around for loose plastic/metal objects, string, yarn, pins, needles, staples, screws/nails and cat toy bells that could harm your cat. Also ensure electrical cords aren't dangling like a tempting toy. Fishing line and lures can be especially harmful, so if you fish, please keep your equipment inaccessible to cats. If you suspect your cat has ingested a foreign object, seek veterinary care immediately. Symptoms can include vomiting, lack of appetite, lethargy, diarrhea or no stool in the box. Symptoms of string ingestion can also include gagging if the string is wound around the base of the tongue.

TOYS

Any toy/object where a cat can get their head stuck should be inaccessible. Toys should always be checked for tears/holes and either repaired or removed from access. Cats can eat soft stuffing, styrofoam beads, plastic fill and other adornments which can cause intestinal obstruction.

KITCHEN/BATH

Ranges, other than induction cooktops, retain enough heat to burn a cat's paws if in contact with the surface. Cats often jump on counters and stoves as they do not know elements are hot. You can prevent burns by keeping an empty pot on top of a recently used element until it has cooled down. Never allow cats and kittens to play in appliances. Never allow a kitten to play near a filled bathtub unsupervised. Essential oils are toxic to cats. Oil burners may cause respiratory distress, or allergic reaction in susceptible cats.

CANDLES

We discourage the use of candles with flames for the safety of all pets and the humans in the home. It takes nothing for a pet to get burned being curious or starting a fire by knocking a candle over. Better options are battery-powered candles.

COLLARS

Collars are often seen as a nice piece of jewellery a cat can wear, in addition to providing information on where the cat resides. We do not recommend collars for cats, but just for the sake of providing the information, there are several different kinds of collars on the market. NEVER put a buckle-type collar on a cat. The only type that is safer for a cat is a quick-release collar that will snap open if the cat gets caught on anything. Before purchasing one, ensure you can easily pull it apart with your hands. We do not recommend collars for kittens at all as they do not have the bodyweight required to snap collars open. Collars that have elastics, silicone collars or ones that don't have a safety mechanism, should not be worn. Cats can slip their paws through the collar and if they become lost, walking allows the collar to "saw" through the armpit and cause a collar injury that can require the amputation of the leg. Always ensure your cat has a tattoo or microchip for permanent ID.

VACATIONS AND CAT-SITTERS

When planning a vacation, consider getting a friend, or professional sitter, who knows your cats well, to visit and feed them. Strangers can often send cats running for cover and they can't be assessed in hiding. Ideally, the cat-sitter will come to meet the resident cats several times prior to the vacation. If any of the cats are especially skittish, it is best to have them in a room with food, water and litterbox so the cat-sitter can ensure they're healthy and are getting what they need. Taking cats to an unfamiliar home is more stressful and they should be confined to a small room for the duration of the vacation to ensure they are calm and can be found. If cats are to go to a boarding facility, vaccinations must be current. Regardless of type of care selected, ask questions, check references and ensure you can be reached in case of an emergency.

PET TRANSPORT CARRIERS

It is imperative to transport cats in a carrier for their own safety and the safety of the driver. Far too many cats suddenly get spooked and free themselves from the arms of their owners at vet clinics, in parking lots, on long trips, when moving or on the way to the cottage. Many of these cats are never recovered or suffer death in traffic while frantically trying to find a place to hide. Cats loose in cars can also get frightened and end up clawing the driver or they may try to hide, causing a collision.

There are several different types of pet carriers on the market. Some are soft-sided, and others are hard-sided with various securing methods. We recommend a hard-sided carrier, with a metal door that uses screws to keep the top and bottom half together. Hard-sided carriers are best in a vehicle as the cat may urinate or vomit during transport. It will ensure contents do not leak out into the vehicle. Metal doors are sturdier and less likely to bend if a cat is trying to escape the carrier. The screws holding the top and bottom halves together ensure that even a heavy cat will not collapse the bottom under their weight. Carriers with clips holding the top and bottom halves together should be zip-tied using the provided holes, or through the holes in the snap mechanism. These carriers are the most likely to come apart under a heavier weight and are more likely to get misshapen allowing the door to pop open. We don't recommend them, but zip-tying makes them safer.

WINDOWS

Windows are great for cats to sit at and watch the world from a safe place. However, they can try to get out of the home this way, so window screens should be checked for tears and to ensure they are locked in place. Examine them periodically for evidence of the cat trying to push their way out and re-screen if necessary. Never open a window without a screen.

PREVENTING ACCIDENTAL ESCAPE

Keeping cats away from doors can be challenging, but it's often as easy as having treats at the door, and getting used to looking down while you exit and enter the home. For most cats, the temptation of a door left ajar too long is an invitation to leave. If you are going in, or out, of the home you can toss treats for them to run and get as you're exiting. When you come in, you can block them from leaving with a piece of cardboard or a broom or groceries. If you are carrying numerous items in, or out, it is best to secure the cat in a room and bring the items in before letting them back out.

If a tradesperson will be working at the home for any length of time, it is best to close the cat in a room for the period when the work will be done. Most cats don't like strangers or the noise of construction and will either hide or run out the door. Cats have also been closed into walls and other areas of construction, so it's best to keep them safe and away from the work being done. Closing them in a room is also important if many people will be in the home at one time (e.g. a party). It is much safer to know where the cat is and to instruct people not to enter the room, than to have to search for your cat afterward. Cats can get into the smallest spaces, so have a look around to see if there are any holes or uncovered vents in the home they can get into. Cover these areas, so your cat doesn't "disappear."

TRAINING YOUR CAT TO KNOW IT'S YOU

In the case of accidental escape from the home, many cats become afraid and hide when they find themselves in unfamiliar territory. They will often not visually recognize their family members because their instinct tells them everyone is a predator, and they need to keep quiet and out of sight. Often, in the wee hours of the morning, a family member can coax a cat out of hiding by the sound of their voice. Cats will be nervous about coming out, but many do show themselves. One strategy we have found works well is if you have a specific song or sound, for your cat. If you have a favourite melody (e.g. a nursery rhyme), incorporate their name into it and sing it to them often. If your cat winds up outside, hiding, hearing that song will signal to them that it is you looking for them and they are more likely to respond. You can also clicker train your cat by using a clicking pen or an actual training clicker for dogs. Make the clicking noise and give them a reward for coming to you (treat). Should they get outside, they will recognize the clicking noise and respond by coming for their treat.

ACCIDENTAL ESCAPE

Should your indoor cat find themselves outside, they are likely to be scared and hiding on their property often within six homes of their own.

Access the Winnipeg Lost Cat Assistance resource blog post for all the information you will require to locate your cat. The sooner all efforts begin, the closer the cat will still be to home.

<https://wpglostcatassistance.blogspot.com/2022/07/wlca-search-tips.html>