

Cat Decompression: Setting Your Cat up for Success

The key to helping your new cat make a successful adjustment to your home is being prepared and being patient. Cats are particularly sensitive to new surroundings and some may hide under a bed or in a closet for days or even weeks.

Before you Come Home

Initial considerations: Before making the decision to add a new cat to your household, please consider if your home large enough for all cats to have adequate territory, if any of your current cats (if relevant) suffer from a chronic illness where the added stress of a new cat may cause further health problems and if any of your cats are already suffering from behavioral issues such as inappropriate marking.

Gather supplies: Get the basics like food, food and water bowls, a breakaway collar, bedding, litter box, litter and toys.

Educate yourself: If you have other pets already, do some homework on how to introduce your new cat to existing pets in the home. This is vital for both your safety and the safety of all of the animals. Detailed steps on how to introduce animals to each other are found at www.MeowFoundation.com. If you have children, teach them now to interact with cats to prevent bites or scratches. Good information is found on www.Catster.com and on www.CatHealth.com.

Prepare a safe room: A safe starter room for the new cat will provide the cat with the quiet and safety she needs while becoming familiar with the scents and sounds of your home. The starter room can be any size but must have a secure door and ceiling.

- Equip the safe room with cat food, water and litter. Place food and water on one side of the room and an open (unenclosed) litter box on the other side. Shyer cats may not eat much during the first 24 to 48 hours and may experience temporary diarrhea from stress. If your cat has not eaten in 48 hours, try some extra tasty treats such as canned tuna or salmon. If this is not successful, you may want to consult your veterinarian for advice.
- Cat proof the safe room by removing plants and small objects which could be broken or swallowed.
- Place a t-shirt or a piece of your clothing that contains your scent in the safe room to help your new cat get to know you.
- Put a new scratching post inside the safe room. Scratching is a natural and comforting behavior for cats. It's also important that the scratching post is new and has not been used by other cats.
- Put the carrier you used to bring your cat home in the safe room. Leave the carrier door open and put a small blanket in the carrier for bedding. It helps for your cat to see the carrier in a positive way so you can transport him or her to the veterinarian more easily.

After You Get Home

Go to the safe room: Keep your cat in the safe room in the beginning and visit frequently for short periods of time. Visiting can mean interacting directly with the new cat in the form of play or petting, or quietly reading a book or chatting on the telephone in the same space as your new companion. Sit on the floor and let her come to you. Don't force her. Just let her get acquainted on her own time. If she doesn't approach, leave her alone and try again later. Some cats are particularly frightened, and she may retreat to her hidey hole and not come out when you're around at all. She may only come out at night when the house is quiet. Give her time.

Transition beyond the safe room: When you and your new cat have established a trusting relationship, the cat is ready to begin exploring the house. Be sure to begin this process when you are home to supervise. Close most of the doors so the cat begins its orientation in stages. Too many new spaces at once can be stressful and frightening. If you've adopted a shy cat, be sure not let her in the basement for many weeks. Most basements have many hiding places—some inaccessible to humans.

Ready to explore the roost: Integration into the rest of the house is dependent on the personality of your new cat (as well as your existing pets). Sometimes the integration process can begin in just two to four days; however, sometimes it is best to wait a couple weeks. Shy cats in particular may need a longer integration period. Follow the integration steps found on www.MeowFoundation.com to introduce your cat to existing dogs and cats in your home to keep everyone safe.

Play time: As your cat adjusts, she'll show signs that she wants to explore outside her safe haven. Make sure other pets or family members won't startle her while she gradually expands her territory. She may be ready to play, so you can furnish some toys. Cats like paper bags and cardboard boxes; you can take a box and cut a hole in the side so your cat can use it like a fort.

Go to the vet: Take your cat to the veterinarian within a couple of week after adoption for a health check to make sure the shelter or rescue did not miss anything. Being an established patient with a veterinarian will allow him or her to provide better care moving forward. If your cat was not microchipped by the shelter or rescue, get this done without delay so she can be identified if she gets lost. Talk to your vet about how much to feed your cat; most commercially manufactured dog food bags have feeding recommendations which will cause your cat to gain too much weight which will limit his life span.

Make future plans: Having a cat comes with costs and may involve unexpected veterinary care. Consider purchasing pet insurance or saving a certain amount of money just in case of emergency. Make a plan to rehome your cat with a family member, friend or co-worker in the event of your death or serious illness so the life of your cat is not at risk.

Patience is key: Your home is a totally new experience for your cat who may be confused or anxious for a number of weeks. Remember to be patient to allow your cat time to adjust to a new environment on his or her schedule once she feels safe.