

Adopting a New Cat? Here Are Tips for a Smooth Transition

Cats, like some people, find change – even positive change – to be stressful. So if you're thinking of adopting a new cat, here are some tips for making a smooth transition into your home. (Next week will be tips for bringing home a new dog.)



By Mark Robison

- **Safe place:** People generally know cats are predators but may not know they are also a prey species, so they need a safe place (a bedroom or bathroom) to hide for the first few days because that is their best coping strategy when in a new place. Some newly adopted cats will be outgoing and instantly join in family activities, while others will need time to get their bearings. Because you may not know how your new cat will react, setting up a room for the new cat is recommended – complete with everything they need, including water and a litter box. Visit the cat regularly but don't force him or her out of hiding. Just sit quietly in the room. Talking or reading to the cat may be helpful. Maybe bring in a little tuna or cat treats. When the cat is comfortable, the door can be opened.
- **Food:** A separate room for a few days also enables you to keep an eye on food consumption. It's important adult cats eat within three days and kittens within 24 hours.
- **Initiate play:** Provide a few cat toys and a cardboard cat scratching pad or sturdy scratching post. Initiating play with a wand or fishing-pole-type cat toy can help some cats come out of their shell.
- **Scents:** Putting a piece of your clothing, and bedding from any other cats in the house, in the safe place gets the new cat used to these scents. Some cats enjoy silvervine, which can have a calming effect.
- **Inside only:** While it's generally best to keep cats indoors because of predators and cars, it is especially important in the first few weeks in a new home that there is no access to the outside world. This is the time when a cat is most likely to run off – something they may be inclined to do until they learn this is really their new home.
- **Other cats:** If you've got other cats, they will likely be territorial. It can help to keep your new cat in their safe room for a few days and let them get to know each other underneath the door. Then swap their locations so the new cat can have a chance to explore the home and so your current cats can learn the new cat's scent. (This also works rabbits, too.) It can also help to get a calming aid, such as the pheromone spray Feliway; it includes a diffuser option, like a plug-in air freshener except it helps your cats feel more chill.
- **Dogs:** If you've got a dog or two, let them see the cat from the opposite side of a baby gate. Help them understand that you want the cat there. Pet the cat and pet them; pet them and pet the



cat. During the first few times the dogs meet the cat without the gate, make sure the dogs are leashed – this is important until you are sure the dogs will not chase the cat.

- **Vet visit:** If your new cat seems happy and healthy, there may be no need for an immediate vet visit as it adds stress for the cat. If you have any concerns, though, many vets will waive the exam fee for a newly adopted pet. Be sure to bring any paperwork from the group adopting out the cat so the vet can see what vaccinations or other treatments the cat may have received.

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