Causes of Stress in Cats

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Q. I just moved and I think that it's stressing my cat out. How can I tell?

A. You might be surprised at how anxious cats can be about any changes in their environment. They are, more than any other pet, creatures of habit for the most part and can be resentful of any change in their routine.
Stresses in a cat's life can come from the environment around her, her physical body, or be caused by feline emotions such as fear.

Environmental Stress

Stressors in a cat's environment would include:

- Moving into a new house or apartment
- Too many animals in the household
- Undue confinement
- Lack of fresh air and/or sunshine, especially if the cat was used to going outside
- Change in daily routine, such as during the holidays.

Physical Stress

Stressors that may directly affect a cat's physical health include:

- Obesity
- Illness
- Physical trauma
- Surgical procedures
- Fleas, worms, or other **parasites**

Emotional Stress

Cats may experience emotional stressors such as:

- Boredom and loneliness
- Death of human or animal family member
- Fear
- Rivalry/jealousy
- Other changes in the number of human or animal family members

Common indications of stress

Cats will show their anxiety in a number of different ways. These can include

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grooming themselves excessively or not grooming at all, refusing to eat, aggression, chewing inedible objects like cloth, and not using the litter box.

The solution you choose depends a lot on the cause of the anxiety.

First, try to determine the cause of the anxiety and if possible, eliminate it. Of course some stresses will 'go away' on their own as the cat gets used to them - for instance, there is not much you can do about a new family member or a separation.

Have your cat examined by your veterinarian to look for any signs of illness. Discuss treatment of stressors such as obesity and parasites.

If your cat is experiencing rivalry or jealously toward another pet, separate the pets temporarily, feeding and paying attention to them at different times. Introductions should be gradual, and may take several weeks to months.

If inappropriate elimination is one of the ways your cat shows tension, add another litter box to the house, and experiment with different types of litter. And remember that as a general rule, it is best to have one more litter box than the number of cats in the household.

If you have an 'only cat' and are not in a position (or do not have the desire) for another one, make sure your kitty has plenty of toys to keep her entertained. Also, be sure to pay enough attention and play with her. You might also want to keep a radio or TV on when you are away.

No matter how many cats you have, if they are inside, be sure to have places where they can see what is going on outside or even sleep in a sunbeam. A window perch near or attached to a windowsill is a perfect choice.

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