

# Bringing Home a New Cat or Kitten

*Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff*

Bringing home a new cat or kitten is always exciting. You cannot wait to introduce the new addition to your family and friends; and you are already looking forward to years of happy companionship. The way you introduce your new cat to your household can make a big difference in how well he makes the adjustment.

Remember that cats are very much creatures of habit. They like things to be predictable and pretty much the same from day to day. You will be taking your cat out of a familiar environment, putting him into a noisy, moving vehicle, then expecting him to adjust to new surroundings, new people and perhaps, new animals. This is a lot to ask, and no matter how wonderful you and your home are, even the most easy-going cat is likely to be stressed and nervous. To make the transition as smooth as possible, take things slowly and give your cat plenty of time to get used to his new home.

Before you bring your new cat or kitten home

Making some plans ahead of time will make the transition to a new home much easier for you and your cat.

First, make an appointment with your veterinarian to have your new pet examined. If possible, schedule the appointment so you can take your cat to the veterinarian immediately after picking him up.

Make sure you have a sturdy travel crate for the cat to ride in. Most of the time the trip home will involve a car ride. When cats are nervous, they may feel more secure in an enclosed space. An unrestrained cat can be a real driving hazard, especially if she climbs down by the pedals, or jumps onto your shoulder. Having your cat in a carrier can also be helpful in case the cat vomits, urinates or defecates, which some cats will do if they are nervous.



The sense of smell is very important to cats, and it will make them more comfortable to have something that smells like their former home. For kittens, it is especially helpful to take a towel or blanket the kitten has been sleeping on with you to his new home. Make arrangements ahead of time with the breeder or shelter, possibly bringing them a towel for the cat to sleep on for several days before you pick her up. Place the towel in the carrier for the ride home, and leave it in the carrier for your new pet to sleep on the first few days.

To limit the number of changes your new pet will need to experience the first day, before you get the cat, find out what food and litter the cat has had, and try to get the same brand. If you want to change brands later, slowly (over the course of a week) mix the new brand in with the old brand.

Before you bring your new cat home, put his food, water, toys, scratching post, and litter pan in a quiet room you can close off, perhaps a spare bedroom. If the new cat is shy, fearful, or you have other cats, the use of the product Feliway may be helpful. Feliway is a product that was designed to help reduce anxiety in cats. It contains pheromones from the cat's face. Pheromones are chemicals which are used to communicate with other members of the same species. You may notice that a cat often rubs her face and chin on vertical surfaces. She is leaving a scent there which contains these pheromones. The pheromones from the face have a calming effect on other cats. You may wish to spray Feliway in the cat's new room, in the cat carrier before and after you pick up the cat, and around the house, if you have other cats. Alternatively, you can purchase a plug-in form of the product to use in the house.

The initial introduction to your home

Cats need to become thoroughly familiar with new surroundings before they feel comfortable. An entire apartment or house can be overwhelming all at once. Many cats will hide under beds or furniture, sometimes for days. It will be much less stressful for your cat to learn about you, your family and your home a little at a time. This is even more important if there are multiple people and/or pets in your household.

When you bring your cat home, place him in the room you have fixed up for him, keep this room closed off, and let him explore that area first. Let the cat come out of his crate on his own; do not try to coax him or tip the crate to force him out. Cats are curious and most will soon come out to explore their surroundings. If the cat seems very timid, you can leave the room for a while and check back later. If you really want to stay in the room, get a book and read. When the cat is ready to come out, stay where you are and let him come to you. Talk in a soft, reassuring tone, pet him if he seems interested, but do not try to pick him up. Leave the open carrier in the room, so that he has a safe retreat if he wants one. Give him time to learn that he can trust you.



The introduction to other family members

Introduce other family members slowly. Have them come into the room one at a time to pet and play with the cat. Have younger children sit down, then show them how to gently stroke the cat's fur and offer her a few treats. Make certain that children understand that they are not to chase the cat, hurt her or bother her while she eats, sleeps or uses the litter box. If there are no other pets, you can let the cat begin to explore the rest of the house in a few days.

## The introduction to other pet cats in your home

If you are bringing your new cat into a home with other cats, keep in mind that there are diseases and parasites that cats can transmit to each other, and some of these are fatal. There are also certain parasites such as roundworms, that people can get from cats. Roundworm eggs are passed in the stool and are so small they cannot be seen without a microscope. Roundworms are especially a concern for young children, who often put their fingers into their mouths after playing with pets. Before you bring a new cat into your household, take it to your veterinarian for an [examination and stool sample](#) check. Your veterinarian will be able to tell you what vaccinations your cat needs and check your cat's stool for intestinal parasites. Your veterinarian can also perform blood testing for [feline leukemia virus](#) (FeLV) and [feline immunodeficiency virus](#) (FIV). Then you can bring your new cat home without concerns about compromising the health of other cats or people in your household.

Keeping the new cat in a quiet, separate room is especially important if there are other cats in the house. The other cats will quickly become aware of your new cat's presence. The cats will usually sniff at each other under the closed door. Do not be surprised if there is some initial hissing. Help the cats get used to each other's scent by rubbing a towel over each of them in turn. Feeding them on either side of the door that closes off the room the new cat is in is also helpful. They will start associating the smell of the other cat with a good thing (food). After a few days, take the new cat out of its room, put the old cat in that room with the door closed, and let the new cat begin to explore the rest of the house for a few hours each evening.

The next step is to let the cats see each other, yet still keep them separated. An old screen door or a piece of Plexiglas works well for this. Another option is to prop open the door of the new cat's room, just enough so that the cats can see each other and put a paw through, but not enough that they can get through the door. After a few days of this, try feeding the cats together but at opposite ends of the room. Monitor the cats during this time, and separate them except at mealtime. Each day, move the food dishes very slightly closer to each other, until the cats are eating side by side. The idea is for the cats to associate each other with the pleasant experience of eating. It is not unusual to hear occasional hissing, but this should decrease as the days go by. If things do not seem to be improving, try decreasing their interaction for a few days.

Once the cats seem comfortable with each other, you can move on to the final step. Open the door all the way, allowing the cats to come and go as they please. Monitor them closely, in case they fight. Do not leave them alone for any length of time until you are sure they will get along well. Provide one more litter box than the number of cats in the household (e.g., if you have two cats, provide three litterboxes). This helps to prevent a more dominant cat from stalking the other and keeping him from using the litter box.

## The introduction to a pet dog in your home



Introducing a new cat into a household where there is a dog is a little different. Keep them separated, with the cat in its own room, for the first few days. Then pick a time when the dog is outside or crated, and let the cat begin to explore the rest of the house. Once the cat seems comfortable in the house, you can begin introducing the dog and the cat. Keep the dog on a short leash, give the command for a sit or a down/stay and allow the cat to come into the room. If the dog is remaining quiet and the cat seems interested, let the cat come over and investigate the dog. The main concerns here are that the dog might get aggressive, or that the cat might claw at the dog's face. Knowing some of your new cat's previous history can help you know what to expect. Obviously, a cat that has been chased by a dog in its previous home is much less likely to do well in a new home with a dog. Some dogs are wonderful with cats, while some can be a threat. There are some dogs who instinctively see small animals as prey to be hunted. Monitor the dog and cat closely and do not leave them alone together until you are certain they will get along well. Make sure there are safe retreats in the house where the cat can get away from the dog. A baby gate across the doorway of one room works well. Position the gate 4 to 5 inches above the floor for young kittens or older cats who cannot jump well. Make sure litter boxes are out of the dog's reach, also, to prevent the dog from eating feces and/or litter, or keeping a frightened cat from using the litter box.

Knowing your cat's history, taking care to pick a cat likely to fit in well with your household (see also [Should I Get a Kitten](#)), and taking the time to gradually introduce the newcomer, will greatly increase the chances of your new cat becoming a happy, permanent member of your family.