

Introducing a new cat into the household

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Introducing a new cat to a home where cats already live can lead to severe disruption and upset if done without planning and control. The introduction process may take only days but can be as long as several weeks to several months. Following a specific protocol will help make the introduction as trouble-free as possible.

Pheromone sprays

Two weeks before the introduction, an 'F3' pheromone product such as Feliway® can be used in both the new and resident cats' areas; this is available as a diffuser or spray and is applied to the environment. An 'F4' product such as Felifriend® is preferred at the time of introduction; this is sprayed in to the environment or on to the hands of the person doing the introduction. Neither product should be applied directly to the cats!

1. Keep the new cat in a separate room, with food, toys, a litter tray (litterbox), scratching post, rest and hiding areas, and perches off the floor. Allow the cat to adapt to its new environment.
2. Allow the new cat limited interaction with the resident cat(s) under the separating door, so that the cats can get used to each other's scents and sounds.
3. Exchange bedding and other objects between cats to intermingle their scents.
4. For further exchange of scent, rub a facecloth on the face and body (especially the cheeks and base of tail) of the resident and newcomer cats. The facecloth containing all the cats' scent should be rubbed against door and furniture corners, to spread the cats' group scent in the core territory.
5. Allow the newcomer to explore other areas of the house and become familiar with its layout and potential hiding and escape areas, while keeping the resident cat(s) away.
6. Start initial short visual introductions, with either the newcomer or resident(s) contained in a cage, crate or pen, or across a glass door, window or mesh screen. This should be done several times a day, and treats given to reward friendly or calm behaviour. **If aggressive responses are noted consistently, stop the visual introductions and seek specialist help.**

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7. Once the cats appear to tolerate each other's presence and there is no aggressive posturing, allow short periods of supervised physical contact by letting them interact freely in one room.
8. Be prepared to intervene if there is any escalation in aggression, chasing or fighting, by using distraction methods (noise, water from bottle) or a heavy blanket to restrain a cat. **DO NOT** handle an aggressive aroused cat directly as it may redirect its aggression toward you.
9. **DO NOT** allow cats together without supervision until several supervised interactions without aggression have occurred, and the cats are calm in each other's presence.
10. Continue to provide newcomer and resident cats with their own feeding bowls. Initially the cats may be fed in separate rooms before being brought together to be fed in the same room.
11. **DO NOT** place feeding bowls close together, as this can cause chronic stress in both cats.
- 12. If the newcomer is not well integrated into the household and aggression between the newcomer and the resident cat(s) persists, seek specialist advice.**

Multi-cat households

Many owners have more than one cat at home. Cats that are related, or that have been together since kittenhood, are more likely to get on than cats that have been introduced as adults.

The most important thing that you can do to make it easier for your cats to live together in harmony is to make sure that there is sufficient space and plenty of resources (litter trays, food and water stations, sleep, resting and hiding places, and scratching posts and surfaces). These should be distributed in a number of different places, to prevent cats from controlling one area and causing confrontation or fights with other cats.

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- There should be easy access to, and exit from, the resources.
- Each resting or hiding place should be big enough for just one, or in some cases two (in the case of related) cats.
- More assertive cats in the home should be fitted with a quick-release collar with bells, to alert other cats to their presence.
- Avoid the use of catnip if it makes one cat very aroused or aggressive toward other cats.
- If you are going to introduce another cat into the home, follow a recommended protocol.
- Consider the use of a pheromone spray to reduce overall tension.