



Bringing Your Shelter Cat Home

Be prepared should be your mantra when bringing a new cat into your home. Cats are particularly sensitive to new surroundings and are territorial. Coming into a new home leaves them feeling really uneasy and some may hide under a bed or in a closet for days or even weeks.

Before You Bring Your Cat Home:

- *Cat Proof your home.* Make your home safe and fun for your new feline friend. Cats are curious creatures and will want to climb and explore their new home. You may find him on upper kitchen cabinets, the stove top, countertops, high shelves, or climbing curtains. Cover any holes that leave pipes, subfloors or inner walls open, remove poisonous plants, secure electrical cords, and store household chemicals out of reach.
- *Create a safe room.* A bathroom, laundry room, or spare bedroom is ideal, as long as the room has a door. Furnish the room with cat amenities, such as food and water dishes, a litter box, toys, scratching post and a bed. You'll want to spend time with your cat, so make sure there's a comfortable place for you to sit as well. You can also add hiding spots and a cat tree for your new cat to explore.
- *Cat Carrier.* Buy a cat carrier or borrow one to bring your new pet home in. You should always travel with you cat in a secure cat carrier. This keeps the cat from escaping and disrupting your driving or potentially getting injured or lost.
- *Research.* Learn how to introduce your new cat to your other pets. Read below for some introduction steps to allow for a safe and happy pet household.

First Days:

The owner of a newly adopted cat must remember that the cat has been placed in an unfamiliar home, with unfamiliar people, new sights, new smells and unfamiliar routines. Pets tend to thrive on routine and consistency; therefore, it is upsetting and scary for a cat to be plucked from a familiar routine and dropped into a new home. For these reasons, it is normal to see stress and fear in a cat that's just been adopted.

- *Settle In.* When the cat first arrives home, bring the cat into it's safe room, open the pet carrier door and leave the room. For the first few hours, the cat will need to explore on his own. Once the cat is completely secure and stress-free in his safe room - usually after a day or two - open the door and allow the cat to explore the house.

- *Spend time with the cat in his safe room.* The cat must become acquainted with his new human family members. Once the cat is comfortable in his safe room, start spending time with the cat in this environment. Sit on the floor and allow him come to you, let him get acquainted on his own time. If he doesn't approach, leave him alone and try again later.
- *Let the cat explore at his own pace.* Do not force him into a scary and stressful situation. He will leave his safe room when he is ready. When the cat begins exploring the house, often at night, do not disturb him. It's also important to allow the cat to have time to explore the home without other pets present. So bring any other cats, dogs or other pets into a separate room, allowing the new cat time to explore.
- *Wait to introduce the new cat to other pets.* Do not immediately introduce the cat to other cats or the pet dog. The cat must be comfortable in his safe room and familiar with the rest of the home before cat-cat or cat-dog introductions can be made.

Introducing your new cat to an already established cat:

When introducing the cat to an already established cat, let the cats get to know each other in their own way. Do this after a few days. You should start of opening the door of your new cats room a small crack so they can see each other but can't touch each other. Keep doing this at intervals until they get used to seeing and smelling each others scents. Expect some hissing, growling and swiping – This is the established cat's way of letting the newcomer that they are on her/his territory.

Never leave the cats alone and supervise their first few meetings. At night or when you are not at home lock the newcomer in their room until you feel comfortable that the cats will be safe if left alone together. It can take anywhere from a few days to a couple of months before the cats can reach an agreement! **Never rush introductions!** Cats can get stressed very easily and they love routine so having to deal with another cat is something that you need to do slowly.

Be sure to have separate food bowls, litter trays and beds for the two cats. Always ensure there is plenty of food, as this will make the transition easier as the established cat realizes that there is no reason to fight over food. Feed the established cat first, so their routine is not changed and they don't feel neglected. Some experts recommend having a litter tray per cat + one. Always make sure they have privacy and put the litter tray where they feel safe from the other animals. Always make sure to give them equal attention so they don't become jealous of each other.

****When introducing your cat to a different pet (dog, rabbit etc) please contact the Behavior Coordinator at BAHS or your local vet for more advice. ****

Following Weeks:

It may take your cat few weeks to adjust. Be patient.

- 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. If your home is particularly large open the rooms up gradually. Make sure your cat always has access to their own room. Young kittens should be brought back into their own room every so often, as they may not be able to find their litter tray when roaming.
- When you take your cat to the vet for check ups, ask them to scan for his microchip. Make sure the chip is still active and hasn't moved down the cat's body and register the microchip number on your pet's vet records.
- It is best to keep your cats indoors. There are many outdoor dangers to cats: cars, wild animals, extreme temperatures, parasites, and diseases. Also, new cats will not be able to find their way back home.
- When changing the cat's diet, be sure to do it gradually. Over the period of a couple of weeks, decrease the amount of current food and increase the amount of new food. A change in diet too quickly can cause diarrhea. **Don't give cats milk.** Cats are lactose intolerant and it can cause an upset stomach, symptoms include vomiting and diarrhea.
- Make sure to keep litter boxes clean. Cats have a very strong sense of smell so a dirty litter box will be very unappealing for them to use.

Summary:

Your new cat has had a rough day already, and will probably be stressed by the time you bring him home. He is most likely used to the close environment of a shelter cage, so it would be best to keep him confined in a small safe room for the first few days, especially if there are other cats in the house.

Let your cat set the rules at first. Don't be surprised if the cat hides under the bed for several days. As long as he or she has food, water, a litter box, a place to sleep, and a toy or two, he will be okay. Chances are when you are not in the room, he will be coming out to eat, use the litter box, or explore.

Gradually increase your together time. Talk to your cat when you are in the safe room. You may want to sit in a chair and read a book. He'll come around when he finally feels safe with you, but don't rush it. Count your victories in small increments: the first time he peeks out at you from under the bed; the first time he plays with a wand toy with you; the first time he takes a treat you offer him. When he finally jumps up and settles in on your lap, you'll know that he is now your cat, and no longer a shelter cat.