



METRO NASHVILLE
ANIMAL CARE & CONTROL

Bringing Your New Cat Home

Congratulations! You decided to adopt a cat!

To ease integration into your home, take into consideration where your cat came from. Was he/she staying in a cage, in a room, or in a foster home? Were there other cats living with him/her or was he/she alone? Was the environment noisy or quiet? How often did he/she eat and where did he/she sleep? Changing all of these factors in his/her environment all at once can be very stressful. In order to integrate your new cat into your house and life as smoothly as possible, you must be able to recognize the signs of stress while changing his/her living situation slowly over time. With this method, you are initially maintaining her previous routine, while changing to your routine over time.

Preparation: Supplies for a new cat

First, prepare to welcome your cat home by making sure you have these items on hand:

- Food and water bowls
- Food
- Treats
- Collar with ID tag
- Cat bed
- Cat toys
- Cat brush
- Cat litter box and litter
- Scratching post or strips

How to recognize signs of stress in a new cat

Your new cat will likely be stressed initially. Signs of stress can include decreased appetite, decreased grooming, hiding, lack of interest in attention or affection, and sleeping in unusual locations. A stressed cat may be more quiet than usual, which can be difficult to notice. Very stressed cats are more likely to behave aggressively or fearfully.

If you've adopted a cat from a shelter, this is most likely your cat's third "home" in a fairly short time period. Even though your house is probably much more comfortable than the shelter where she came from, change is stressful. Watch for signs of stress, and if you see them, make certain that they lessen over time.

Your cat's environment

Being moved from a small enclosure to an apartment or house is a big change. Your home also has different smells and noises than the shelter and the home where your cat lived before. Initially, confine your new cat to one room. Your bedroom or the living room often works well for this. Make sure that you provide your new cat with food, water, and a litter box (see below), and that you regularly spend time in this room with him/her, so that he/she is not alone.

Provide your cat with multiple hiding places. A cardboard box with holes cut in both sides and a blanket placed in the bottom can be a great hiding place. Be certain to provide him/her with hiding places on the ground, as well as up high. When he/she is in his/her hiding place, do not disturb him/her. **A cat's hiding place should be a special place where they can go for privacy if they need it.**

Place a scratching post or cat tree in his/her room. Place his/her scent on the cat tree by gently stroking his/her cheeks with a towel, and then rubbing the scratching post with the towel. This will transfer his/her scent onto the scratching post, thereby increasing the likelihood that he/she will use it.

Let your cat adjust to the room, and to you. Do not force him/her to stay near you. Instead, coax him/her to you by playing with an interactive toy or staying near his/her food bowl while he/she is eating. Once he/she realizes that this stranger (you) provides delicious treats and safety, he/she will warm quickly to you and accept your attention.

After three days, or once your cat is comfortably walking around and living in this room, expand his/her access to the entire house. **For some cats, it may take several weeks before they are comfortable in their room and can be allowed access to the whole house.**

Feline diet

Cats eat less when they are stressed, and sometimes stop eating altogether. It is extremely important to make sure that your cat is eating regularly (and adequate amounts) once you have brought him/her home. If he/she is not eating, try mixing a little bit of a tastier food, such as canned cat food or baby food, into his/her meal.

Changing your cat's diet too rapidly can cause upset to his system (decreased appetite, vomiting, and/or diarrhea). If this happens, call your veterinarian. Decide whether you wish to feed your cat once daily, twice daily or free choice (which means leaving dry food out at all times). For most cats, twice-daily feeding is ideal. You can also put some of your cat's daily ration into a food-dispensing toy. Food-dispensing toys are a fun way for your cat to "hunt" for his/her food, and are a great way to enrich his/her life. Do not start using a food-dispensing toy until your cat has completely settled into your home.

Litter box

Provide your cat with an uncovered, clean litter box. Covered litter boxes can trap odors inside the box, which is nice for you, but not for your cat. Cats are often quite fastidious; they are sensitive to the smell of urine and feces, as well as deodorizers. Reducing the smell inside and around the litter box can be very important for them. Scoop out the litter box once daily and empty it completely to clean it every two weeks. When you clean the litter box, use a mild soap, not strong-smelling detergents or ammonia. A common reason that cats are brought to shelters is litter box and housesoiling problems. Following the above recommendations can make the difference between a cat who is house-trained and a cat who isn't. Remember that if you do not like the smell of the litter box, your cat probably doesn't either; keep it clean and you'll have a happy cat.

Cat toys

There are many different toys that your cat might like to play with. Cats like novelty, so buy several different types of toys for her and try them out. Play with the toys with your cat; do not set them out and expect him/her to play with them on his/her own. If he/she is not interested in them for the first few days, give him/her time, and try different toys. Do not play with your cat with your hands. Using your hands as a toy teaches your cat that it is okay to bite or scratch you.

Click here for more [Cat enrichment ideas](#)

Indoors vs. Outdoors

One of the big decisions cat owners must make is whether to allow their cat outside. There are many risks outdoors that can shorten your cat's life span. He/She could be hit by a car, poisoned, attacked by a dog, or infected with an incurable virus. However, many cats really enjoy being outdoors and miss the stimulation of the natural world if they are kept inside all the time.

There are several different ways that you can allow your cat to enjoy the outdoors without the risk. You can install perches on windowsills around the house so that your cat can sit at the window, watch the outdoors, and enjoy the sunlight. With patience, you can teach your cat to walk with a harness or leash, and then you can take him outdoors for walks.

Slow and steady is the way

The key to successful integration of your new cat into your home is being aware of the signs of stress and making sure that they remain minimal. Change his/her environment slowly. Remember that although these recommendations work for most cats, they will not work for every cat. If your cat is showing signs of stress and is not improving, please contact your veterinarian or a behaviorist.