

Introducing the new cat



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You already have a cat, but you really want to get another one. The problem is you're not sure how your current cat will react to a new addition. Before you bring a new cat into your home, there are some factors to consider, such as territory, age, background, gender, personality and spay/neuter status. Cats aren't pack animals like dogs, so it is possible that the two cats may never like each other and may just develop an uneasy truce. There are some things, however, you can do to make the introduction go smoothly.

Because cats are territorial, make sure you have enough room for multiple cats. To make things easier, each cat should have its own litterbox, food dish and place to hide. A joint water dish is acceptable. Make sure your new cat has been to the vet to get wormed, vaccinated and tested for feline leukemia.

The new cat should be younger or close to the age of your current cat. An older cat could be aggressive and intimidate your current cat, while a kitten could be too young to protect itself or too energetic for a middle age or older cat to handle. Some older cats are so set in their ways that they may have trouble adjusting to a new cat no matter what age it is. To avoid rivalry, it is best to adopt a cat of the opposite sex, and to avoid territorial spraying, it is best to have both cats spayed or neutered.

When it comes to communication and well being, a cat's sense of smell is very important. That is why prior to introducing your new cat you need to take care of its smell. If possible, give your new cat a bath to neutralize its odors. If you can't give it a bath when you get home, there are a few ways you can mask the odor of the new cat. You can spray a diluted, inexpensive perfume on both cats before the introduction or rub a clean, damp towel on your current cat and then

rub it on the new cat to transfer the odor, and vice versa. The cats will accept each other better if they smell alike.

When you do bring home the new cat, keep it in a separate room for a day or two. While it is confined, the current cat will get a chance to become accustomed to it. Then confine the current cat to the same room and let the new cat roam the house. On the next day, let the two cats come together.

When you introduce the two, make sure you are home and the household is calm. Don't leave the cats alone and don't be nervous or they will be, too. Be prepared for some chasing, hissing or minor fighting. Don't restrain either cat-let them work it out. If either one of the cats wants to leave the room, let it. It is ok to let the two cats out when someone is at home, but when you are gone, you should separate the two again. It could be weeks before you feel comfortable leaving them alone. The first time you do leave them alone, it should be for a short time, and then you can gradually increase their time alone together.

During the first few months, be on the lookout for signs of trouble. If you notice litterbox lapses, a lack of appetite, lethargy, depression or fighting that draws blood, you need to address the problem right away. Call your vet or an animal behavior specialist for advice.

In time, the cats will either learn to get along or just tolerate each other. It is rare that two cats won't eventually get along, even though they may have the occasional spat. Remember, the two cats probably won't get along overnight-it could take months. You just need to be patient and resist the urge to interfere.