

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

HOW TO INTRODUCE A NEW CAT TO OTHER CATS IN YOUR HOME



Bringing a new cat into your home can be a wonderful experience, but it can be a challenge if you already have one or more cats. It's important to plan carefully to ensure a smooth transition for all involved. Introduce a new cat slowly to minimize stress and prevent tension and conflict. This process can take anywhere from a few days to a few months, and sometimes longer. Do not move to the next step until each cat is comfortable with the current step.

BEFORE BRINGING THE NEW CAT INTO YOUR HOME

Step 1: Ensure Each Cat is Healthy

Before introducing a new cat to the resident cat(s) in your home, all the cats should have had a recent veterinary check-up and be in good health.

- The new cat should be tested by your veterinarian for common contagious diseases.
- Do not consider adopting another cat if you have a resident cat who is in poor health or is a senior with medical concerns.

Step 2: Prepare the Home

This step involves creating a comfortable and secure environment for both your resident cat(s) and new cat to live in. Here's how to prepare your home before bringing in a new cat:

Essential Resources That Each Cat Needs: The 5 Pillars

Pillar 1. Safe Places: Each cat should have their own hiding spots, high-sided cat beds, and elevated perches.

Pillar 2. Resources: Provide one litter box, water bowl, food bowl, high-sided bed, and scratching post per cat, plus one extra, in a private but accessible space. Each resource should be visually separated from the others.

Pillar 3. Simulated Hunting and Play Opportunities: Engage your cat's hunting instincts by using a variety of toys for playtime and puzzle feeders for mealtimes, which helps reduce boredom and prevent undesirable behaviors.

Pillar 4. Positive Human Interaction: Provide regular, positive, and predictable caregiver-cat social interactions.

Pillar 5. Respect Sensory Needs: Use feline synthetic pheromones (e.g., Feliway Optimum); avoid loud, sudden noises; prevent exposure to undesirable smells (e.g., perfumes, strong-scented cleaning products).

Create a transition room for the new cat. The transition room is a safe place for your new cat to be housed without other cats or pets, and contains their own set of resources including food, water, a litter box, perches, hiding spots, scratching surfaces, toys, and a high-sided cat bed to allow hiding.

- This room should be quiet and away from high-traffic areas.
- The room must be able to be secured (e.g., lock, latch), to keep the new cat and resident cat(s) from unsupervised interaction.
- Include furniture, perches, or cat trees to give access to vertical spaces. This increases a cat's control over their environment. Offer some elevated spaces with hiding options for less confident cats.
- Remove anything that could be dangerous to the cat, like toxic plants, electrical cords, or dangling strings. Remove any valuables or breakables that you don't want your new cat to investigate. Also, remove anything that might tempt them to urinate or defecate in the wrong spot, like plush rugs or mats.

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Step 3: Plug in Feline Synthetic Pheromone Diffusers

Plug in one feline synthetic pheromone diffuser in the main living area and one in the transition room 24–48 hours before the new cat arrives to help create a calm environment for all cats.

Step 4: Identify Favorite Activities or Treats for Each Cat

Treats and favorite activities can be used as training rewards. Be sure to identify what every cat prefers, for use later in the introduction process.

THE INTRODUCTION PROCESS

It is vital not to rush the introduction process. Be patient and wait for the cats to show signs of comfort before moving to the next step. If you continue to take steps forward when each cat is not yet comfortable with the current step, it can result in long-term tension between the cats.

Step 5: Bring the New Cat into the Transition Room

- The new cat should come into the home in a carrier that is covered with a towel or blanket to prevent cats from seeing each other, and be brought directly into the transition room. Open the carrier door and let the cat choose when to come out and explore their safe space in the transition room.
- Cats are often fearful of changes in their physical and social environment, and some more than others. To help minimize fear, provide hiding options such as high-sided cat beds, the carrier covered with a towel or blanket, and cardboard boxes, as well as a cat tree or perch so there are different heights for the cat to choose in the room. These safe spaces should remain here during the introduction period so the new cat always has a safe hiding option if they are fearful. If the new cat is fearful of the scent, sounds, or presence of the resident cat(s), keep the resident cat(s) away from the door to the transition room (see Step 8).
- Remain at this step until the new cat is not hiding all the time and explores the transition room confidently. This step can take a few days, and longer for some cats.

Step 6: Begin Scent Introduction

Once the new cat is comfortable in the transition room, begin gradually introducing the cats to each other's scent:

- Swap bedding or other soft items such as toys between the new cat and resident cat(s). This allows them to get familiar with each other's smell without direct contact.
- Repeat this step daily until the cats do not respond with tension to the new scent. Signs of stress could include urinating/defecating outside the litter box, not going near the item, growling, hissing, pacing, or changes to the cat's normal behaviors.



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Step 7: Begin Scent Transfer

If the cats are comfortable with each other's scent on items in their room after a few days, you can proceed with rubbing soft material that contains the scent from one cat over the other cat's cheeks and chin, and in between the eyes and ears.

- Repeat with all cats until they are comfortable with the scent transfer.
- After scent transfer, place the pieces of scented material where the cats can smell them.

Step 8: Playtime Interaction Without Seeing Each Other

If cats are not stressed with scent transfer, encourage them to play on each side of a closed door.

- Make a dumbbell-like toy by tying two cat toys together with strong string, and put one toy on each side of the closed door. The cats should not be able to see each other.
- Keep play sessions short (5–20 minutes) and stop before the cats lose interest.
- If one cat hisses or growls at the door, do not discipline the cat. Instead, stop the interaction and distance the cats before allowing them to try again by creating a neutral space or barrier in front of the transition room door. If a resident cat is pawing at the door or staying near it for extended periods of time, add a second barrier such as a shoji screen, boxes, or chairs.

Step 9: Supervised Exploration

Once the new cat is settled in the transition room and all cats seem comfortable with the previous steps, you can begin supervised exploration of the house for the new cat.

- Put the resident cat(s) in a separate and favored room with a closed door, and provide treats and toys to make it a positive experience.
- Allow the new cat to briefly explore the communal areas of the house. This might be the living room, hallway, or another area. Over a few days, gradually increase the exploration time to help the cat become familiar with the new surroundings in a controlled way.
- After a short exploration period, return the new cat to the transition room and give the resident cat(s) a choice to return to the communal areas they were previously removed from (do not force them).

Step 10: Visual Access

- Allow short sessions where the cats can see each other through a screen, glass door, extra tall cat gate (door-sized pet gate), door-strap product (e.g., 'Door Monkey'), or similar see-through barrier. This creates a safe, controlled environment and helps them become accustomed to each other's presence before direct contact. If the cats are comfortable with their carrier and have only had positive experiences in it, you can also use partially covered cat carriers for this step.
- If all cats are calm, allow the cats to engage in short play sessions (5–20 minutes) through or under the door where they can see each other.
- Closely monitor each cat's body language and vocalizations. If they are not comfortable, stop immediately and go back to Steps 8 and 9 for a few more days before trying again.



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Step 11: Supervised Physical Proximity

Once the cats seem comfortable seeing each other through a barrier (glass door, screen, etc.), you can gradually progress to supervised physical access with harnesses and leashes, or with one cat in a partially covered carrier and the other(s) allowed to explore. Learn about training your cat to walk on a harness and leash here: catfriendly.com/harness-and-leash.

- Start with short, supervised visits in a large room. If you have a helper, each person can hold one cat's leash on opposite sides of the room, playing with them as a distraction and/or offering treats as rewards for calm behavior. This creates a positive association with each other's presence.
 - If you are using a carrier, place the more relaxed cat in a large partially covered carrier with a special treat or toy. Play with the other cat while the first cat has the chance to observe. Only use a carrier for this step if the cat is familiar and comfortable with the carrier, and has only had positive experiences within it.
- Monitor the cats' body language closely.
- Never interact with cats who are hissing, growling, tail flicking, or showing other signs of stress because when cats cannot access the cat they are directing their behavior toward, they may redirect frustration onto the closest target (e.g., biting). Instead, keep an item nearby that can be used as a barrier, such as a large towel, piece of cardboard, pillow, cushion, or blanket to block visual contact between cats if you start to see tension.
- Supervise all interactions between the cats and use wand toys or other toys or treats to distract and encourage positive associations.
- If these sessions are going well, repeat this interaction for several days, gradually increasing the time the cats are together until the cats can coexist without tension.

Remember, **patience is key!** By taking things slowly and creating positive experiences, you can help your new cat and resident cat(s) gradually become comfortable with each other and avoid long-term tension.

Adopting More Than One New Cat

If you are bringing more than one new cat into a household at the same time, and you already have one or more resident cats, the same steps above will be followed with these considerations:

- If the new cats are bonded (friendly to each other), they can be in the same transition room and go through the steps together. If they are not bonded, then each new cat needs their own transition room and must go through the steps separately. They will also need to be introduced through each of these steps to both the resident cat(s) and the other new cat. Alternatively, consider bringing unbonded cats into the household at different times in order to introduce one at a time.
- Every new cat must have their own set of resources and needs to go through each of the steps of the introduction process at their own pace. Some may be introduced more quickly and others may take much longer.



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KEEPING YOUR CATS CALM AND HAPPY



Here are some ways you can help prevent and defuse tension between your cats:

Additional Resources: Place additional resources (see list of essential resources above, at Step 2) throughout the home to prevent competition and tension. Not having sufficient, visually separated resources is the most common cause of tension between cats. This includes litter boxes, food and water bowls, scratching posts, elevated perches, and hiding spots. Ideally, have one of each resource per cat, plus one extra, in a private but accessible location. Spread these resources throughout the house to avoid creating congested areas.

Playtime for Everyone: Cats with lots of energy can be a handful for older or more shy cats. Schedule two or more play sessions every day, for at least 5 minutes each, with these cats. Use toys to channel that playful energy so these cats do not redirect it onto other cats during introduction sessions.

Early Warning System (Optional): Consider putting a cat-safe collar with a well-secured tiny bell on the cat who tends to create tension with the other cat(s). The bell's gentle chime can warn other cats of their approach, giving them a chance to leave and avoid unwanted interaction.

Time Apart When Needed: If tension occurs between cats, a short separation can be helpful. Make sure each cat has access to a complete set of resources in their temporary space.

Break Up Staring Contests: Block ongoing staring matches with a solid piece of furniture/material or use vertical space (like cat shelves) to prevent direct eye contact.

Important: Don't pick up the cats during a tense moment. Instead, place a pillow, cushion, or a toy between them to break eye contact and distract them. Then, try to get them engaged in separate activities (playing with individual toys) or safely move them into different rooms.

Group Play Sessions: Daily playtime with all your cats together, or with compatible pairs of cats, is a great way to help them get used to each other and learn to relax in one another's company. Cats should not be forced to interact with each other if they are uncomfortable with these sessions. This is also a good time to encourage them to use the climbing structures and comfy spots you have provided around the house, which is especially important for cats who do not want to interact with other cats.



For additional caregiver resources visit catfriendly.com/tension.

This guide accompanies the *2024 AAFP Intercat Tension Guidelines: Recognition, Prevention and Management*, which can be accessed at catvets.com/tension and are published in the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery* (go.jfms.com/Intercat_tension_GLs_2024).