



# Introducing Cats.

## Multi-cat households: the pros & cons

Cats that have feline company while you are away at work are less likely to misbehave out of boredom, suffer from separation anxiety or depression and if they are raised with other cats, can be more adaptable to physical or social changes in their environment. Cats are essentially territorial however so it is important to recognize each individual's spatial and social needs. Overcrowding can cause stress for the cats, which can often cause behavior problems. Allowing the cats to take their time with the introduction, providing the purrrfect set-up and following the introduction process are important elements of a peaceful coexistence for felines.

## How long will it take?

In most cases, cats are not able to adjust to each other within a couple of hours or even days like dogs.

This is because of the difference in species social systems. How quickly your feline friend can adjust to a new cat depends on the socialization level of the individual cats. Younger cats, cats who have been raised with other cats or have successfully lived with other cats can adjust to living with a new cat more quickly. Cats who have not been socialized with other cats or who have not lived with

other cats for many years, may need more time and patience in order to develop the ability to coexist with other cats. Consider also any age differences. Different age groups have different nutritional, energy release and social needs. Pairing a kitten with an elderly cat may require more assistance than pairing cats of similar age.



## The purrrfect set-up

Because cats are territorial, the environmental setup can make the difference between peaceful coexistence or strife. First, all cats should be spayed, neutered and current on their vaccinations. Set aside a private living space for the new cat such as a bedroom with the cat's own litter box, food, water, scratching surface, bed and hiding space. Make sure that your current family cats also have access to all these necessities in the rest of the house.

## The introduction process

The cats will have an easier time accepting each other if they do not have to see each other in the beginning. It is also important that the cats do not have contact until your veterinarian has deemed them all healthy. This is particularly



important for the new cat.

The following steps should be followed in order and you should watch all cats, making sure that everyone is comfortable and content before moving on to the next step.

**1. Environmental introduction:** Bring the new cat into his designated space and allow him to familiarize himself with that space and the residual smells and sounds of your other cats first.

**2. Scent Introduction:** Swap scents for the cats. This is an important step because cats communicate through smell using pheromones every day either by head rubbing, body rubbing or scratching. Pet each cat on the face, cheeks and body with a different cloth or hand towel and then place that cloth under or near the other cat's food dish. This will start building positive associations with the scent of the unfamiliar cat.

**3. Scent Introduction next step:** Trading spaces. Use carriers if you need to prevent the cats from seeing each other, but allow the new cat to explore your resident cat's living space and allow your resident cats to explore the room where the new cat has been living.

**4. Visual Introduction:** If all cats are comfortable and not showing any signs of agitation, frustration or fear, you can allow visual contact with a barrier during feeding times. This again will build positive associations but only if the contact is short enough and far away enough for the cats to feel comfortable eating. Barriers can be a cracked door, a baby gate, a glass or screen door. Carriers can be used in this step if the cats are comfortable going into the carrier on their own. If you are introducing more than 2 cats, introduce each cat separately.

**5. Visual introductions continued:** When all cats are relaxed with visual access to the unfamiliar cat during feeding time, try to bring the feeding station closer to

each other. This will likely take at least several days. Once the cats are relaxed eating in close proximity of each other, you can extend the amount of time they are spending with each other under close supervision. Redirect any chasing to a toy and ensure that the cats have hiding places that are small enough to fit only one cat.

### Ensuring lasting peace

Because cats are territorial and disputes among cats can often be in relation to resources, make sure to provide an environment of plenty. Provide one litter box per cat in the household and add one more, making sure they are located in different areas of the house. One shared litter box or litter boxes all in one space does not provide for the territorial needs of many cats. Clean all litter boxes daily. Provide access to as many vertical spaces as possible such as window perches, cat towers, chairs, and couches in multiple rooms. Provide hiding spaces for each cat. Provide multiple feeding and water stations. Ensure that each cat gets the playtime with you and lap-time they require every day. This varies from cat to cat but playtime with you is generally essential daily for younger cats and older cats will show you their preference.