

What to Expect When You're Expecting....A New Feline Family Member

Imagine trying to learn new people as well as a new household, new routines, and new rules. It's not easy for many cats to transition into a new home.

Felines are creatures of habit. They are also territorial creatures who like to leave their scent to mark their territory (all that rubbing against chair legs). They like to patrol their environment and know every nook and cranny.

Different cats react in different ways to change, but they all benefit from a gradual introduction to a new household.

Some cats adjust more readily to change while others take some time to transition into a new home. The following information will help you prepare for kitty to come home and, just as important, prepare yourself and your family for what to expect during the first days and weeks as your new feline friend becomes a part of your household and your family.

Setting Up a Sanctuary Room

1. Set aside one room that will serve as the "sanctuary room" for kitty. Choose a room with a door, one that is typically quiet. Make sure all the windows are secure and shut. Try to choose a room that does not have a hiding spot or spots where you can't reach kitty (like under a king-sized bed.)
2. Set up food and water bowls in one corner of the room and litter box in a separate corner.
3. Add toys and a safe hiding spot – such as a cat carrier with door removed or cardboard box.

Preparing the House and Family: Ground Rules and Safety Precautions

1. A new furry family member is sure to be exciting. Prepare all family members for the fact that kitty is going to need some patience and space in acclimating to a new home. Prepare children to potentially give kitty some space for a few days while he gets used to his new environment and new people.
2. Make sure everyone understands the vital importance of closing doors and windows. Just because your current cat doesn't dart out an open door while you're bringing in the groceries does not mean every cat will react the same way.
3. Make sure your household is safe and secure for a new cat:
 - a. Make sure cords and strings (blind cords, ribbons) and even rubber bands are put away out of kitty's reach.
 - b. Make sure all doors and windows close securely so kitty can't sneak out into the not-so-great outdoors
 - c. Make certain that cleaning materials, insecticides, etc., are stored in a place kitty cannot access – you'll be surprised how adept cats can be at opening cabinets!
 - d. Remove breakable objects from shelves and block access to places kitty might sneak into and get stuck (like behind the washer and dryer).

Bringing Kitty Home

1. Always bring your new cat or kitten home in a secure carrier. If you do not have one, we're happy to lend one to you!
2. Everyone is sure to be excited when the new furry family member arrives, but avoid overexcitement (especially for children) as much as possible. Loud voices and desires to snuggle should be tempered with consideration for the stress level of the new cat.
3. Do not introduce the new cat to existing pets during the first day or even the first few days in the home. Ignore their curiosity upon the arrival of the new furry family member, and proceed (with cat in carrier) to the sanctuary room.
4. Open the carrier in a corner and let kitty come out of the carrier at her own speed. Leave the room to give kitty time to explore her new territory.
5. Check on your new furry friend every few hours. Know that some cats will walk out of the carrier and make themselves at home within minutes. Others will take a few hours or even days before they feel comfortable enough to welcome you when you come.

What to Expect in the First 24 Hours

1. Do not be surprised if you see little of the cat during the first 24 hours. Hiding is to be expected – she's experiencing A LOT of change. It's also not uncommon for a new cat to not really eat or use the litter box in the first 24+ hours in a new home.
2. Be guided by your cat's comfort level. If she is out and about in the sanctuary room, spend some time sitting on the floor with her or perhaps playing with a toy. Don't overdo with too many family members coming in at once.
3. Try to keep kitty on the same food he's been eating for the first few days home to avoid upset tummies. Transition slowly and gradually (over the course of 10-14 days, at least) to any new food you plan to feed. Mix his "old food" with his "new food", increasing the percentage of the new food over time.

Venturing Outside of the Sanctuary Room

1. Spend time with your new cat in her sanctuary space. If the cat appears to be confident and looking for human interaction, allow other family members to come in and share some quality time getting to know the new cat. When you sense that the cat feels safe in her room (usually after a few days to a week), open the door and let her explore the rest of the house – under supervision.
2. Do not let other cats or dogs into the room at this stage, because this can be very stressful for all animals involved. See our separate fact sheet on introducing your new cat to existing cats and our fact sheet on introducing dogs and cats.
3. Be guided by your new cat as to when he's ready to venture out from the sanctuary space and learn the rest of the house. If your house is very large, consider opening up one floor of the house, or letting kitty have more run of the house only when you are home. The last thing you want is a cat who is hiding somewhere you cannot find her....or a cat who is so confused as to what's where that she doesn't know where to find the litter box.

What to Expect from a Medical Perspective

1. Stress affects the immune system, so do not be surprised if you see signs of a kitty cold or similar immune response to the stress of a new home. If kitty gets the sniffles, consider adding an open capsule of L-Lysine to wet food daily and offering “sauna therapy” by bringing the cat into a bathroom and running a hot shower for 10 minutes to help open up airwaves. In many cases, you can avoid starting your cat on antibiotics by treating symptoms and boosting the immune system.
2. While your new FOHA cat is up-to-date on all of his shots, it is still a good idea to make an appointment with your vet. Take along a copy of kitty’s medical records for your vet to have on file. You’ll want your vet to know your new cat’s baseline weight and vitals so that if you do have an emergency in the future, your vet is prepared with the knowledge of what “normal” looks like for your new cat.