



Bringing home your first pet cat

How to help your cat settle in

Deciding to bring a cat or kitten into your family is always an exciting prospect but, first, there's a few things that need taking care of before your latest family addition gets introduced to your home and the other family members.

First things first

Shopping list

Cat carrier box - this may be provided by the place where you buy your cat, if not, most good pet stores will have them. The SPCA also supplies pet items including carrier boxes.



Food & Water Bowls - don't be tempted to use your own household items for your pet's bowls; they need their own that can be easily distinguished and kept separate from human eating utensils and crockery.

Food - initially buy small packets or containers of food for your cat until you discover what brand/flavour they prefer. Some cats can be quite finicky so there's no point in buying a large bag of food (that may or may not go to waste) before you've tried a few different options on them.

Brush or comb - this is essential for cats that are especially prone to fur-balls as grooming them helps keep fur-balls out of their digestive tract but also helps keep your furniture hair and fur-free.

Scoop for Litter tray - often forgotten this is definitely needed to retrieve the solid litter from the tray without having to dispose of the entire bed.

Litter & Litter trays - it's absolutely essential that you provide the means for your new cat to be able to go to the toilet in a private, clean place especially when they are not yet accustomed to going outdoors. Ensure you train them use the litter tray so that they are discouraged from using other areas of your home. And place the tray at least 1.5m away from their bedding and food area. Typically, it is difficult to get rid of cat pee once it has seeped into carpet but we provide a number of products that help get rid of the smell and other products that help deter your cat from peeing in areas other than the litter tray.



Safety Collar and Bell - collars provide a place for the identification tag and a bell. If your cat goes wandering at least, with a collar, other people will know he or she belongs to someone rather than thinking it potentially being a feral cat. Having an ID tag with a contact phone number on it readily helps you become reunited with your cat. The bell will prove a hinderance to your cat being able to catch and kill birds or bring them into you home as their toy.



Bedding - yes, while cats can sleep anywhere, they also like to have their own bed area that is theirs alone and remains in the same place. Make sure it's in an area that gets shade so they're not sweltering in the sun all day long.

Flea & Worm Treatment - this is a must for keeping your cat healthy and free of fleas or worms. Fleas get worse in the warmer weather and if not treated can spread to your home. Your cat will present with consistent itching and scratching that may result in broken skin or they may be grooming themselves excessively. Cats can get intestinal worms that feed off your cat's food meaning your cat is getting less nutrients from the food resulting in deteriorating health through a distended belly, increased tiredness, and dulling of their coat. Kittens can die as a result of worms if not treated quickly and effectively as their immune systems are still developing and not yet robust enough to counter a severe intestinal worm invasion.

Set Up One Dedicated Room

Set up one room - preferably a smaller, well ventilated room where you can keep your cat for 2-3 days while they settle into the new environment.

- Ensure they have water, food, litter and litter tray, scratching post and somewhere to hide.
- They should also have some comforts like bedding and toys.
- Having your cat contained in one room initially helps with the toilet training.
- Put the litter tray at the farthest point from the bed and food areas (at least 1.5m).
- Cat proof the area by removing dangerous wires, curtain rods and cords, and anything loose that could topple over or off an area - like table cloths.
- Remove all breakable or sratchable items.
- If this room is the bathroom, keep the toilet lid closed.



The Journey Home...

On the journey home, your cat is likely to be feeling scared from being trapped in the carrier box and from the motion of the car as well as the extra noise so may be unpredictable. It's therefore advised to not interact with the cat during this drive and definitely do not open the carrier door. When you're safe at home and in a secured area you can then let the cat out to meet you all properly and get settled into their new home.

Next Steps

Following the initial 2-3 days settling-in period you can encourage your cat to slowly explore the rest of the house - perhaps room by room, or just keeping your cat contained within the living areas with doors to all other rooms closed.

Doing this on a room-by-room basis helps stop your cat from feeling too overwhelmed and also means you don't have to worry about all manner of mischievous things that they could get up to or cause themselves harm.



- Try not to scare your cat - they are likely to be very timid and on-edge these first few days as they get used to new surroundings and new people. Lots of noise and unexpected movements will cause some anxiety. Don't panic if you find your cat hiding for most of the time in those initial days. They will venture out eventually and with a little coaxing from you but don't force this - they will come out on their own.
- Keep your cat inside during this period so they don't get lost or run away. The longer they have to become accustomed to your, the family, and their immediate environment they more likely they are to remain.
- Adult cats should be kept inside for 3-4 weeks when settling into a new environment.
- Kittens should be kept inside for 6-8 weeks when they're first introduced to the new environment and once they're ready to explore outside you need to supervise them until they are old enough to protect themselves.
- When introducing your cat to the whole family try not to give them too much attention from everyone all at once as this will overwhelm them and may cause some stress. Let them wander around the living area and they will explore each individual on their own.
- Teach children to handle the cat with care and attention and not to antagonise or harm them in any way.
- Introducing other pets of the household should be done slowly and only when the cat seems to feel content and settled in their new environment.



Helping your cat settle

Cat doors

Cat doors help your cat go in and out as they please and are especially handy for when they require the toilet.

- Use a lockable door and one that has a magnet that is calibrated to a twin one that your cat wears in their collar. This means only your cat will be able to come through the door and not all the other neighbourhood cats.
- Encourage your cat to use the cat door by pulling their toys through the door or placing food on the other side.



Toilet training

Start your cat in one room and get them to use the kitty litter for their toilet area. Be prepared for one or two accidents at the start - it may be beneficial to keep the litter tray in the bathroom area, or at least one with floor tiles.

Do not punish your cat for not using the kitty litter and going beside it as punishment doesn't work and often makes things worse.



Litter Tray Set-up

Place the litter tray at least 1.5m away from your cat's food/water and their bedding area as cats prefer it to be kept separate. Another room would be ideal and somewhere with uncarpeted flooring so that accidents can be wiped up more easily.

- Keep the tray in the same place so that your cat knows where to always find it.
- If you have a large house, you will need more than one tray placed at separate areas.
- For multiple cats you will also need more than one tray and ideally one tray per cat plus one extra tray in the different areas.
- Line the tray with newspaper and a few cups of litter. Do not fill it up - just provide enough litter for your cat to scratch around in; litter isn't designed to bury the waste, and having the litter tray too full you can expect to find a lot of it being scratch out of the tray on to the surrounding floor.
- Change the litter frequently and clean the tray - cats do not like dirty litter trays and you may find that they stop using it if it's unclean or the litter is overused.
- Wash with hot soapy water or 50:50 water and vinegar. Rinse well to avoid strong cleaning smells.



Litter Tray Training

After litter tray set up, introduce your cat to the tray by picking them up and placing them in the tray at random times throughout the day - especially after eating or drinking.

If they use the tray give them a little pat or a treat after they have finished. It's important to not interrupt or disturb them by interacting with them while they are using the tray. Leave them to do their business on their own.

- If you see your cat preparing to toilet somewhere other than their tray, distract them, pick them up and take them to their tray.
- If your cat has already started toileting outside the tray, wait until they've finished then pick them up and take them to their tray, praising them if they have a bit of a scratch around.
- Do not pick up the cat while yelling or throw or push them into their tray as they will associate the tray with punishment and will most likely avoid it.

Your cat may go to the toilet outside the tray or in other areas of the home if:

- Litter tray is wrongly positioned - try a different place
- Litter tray is dirty - clean regularly with hot soapy water or water and vinegar. Rinse thoroughly as lingering detergent/vinegar smells may be deterring them. Cats are very clean animals, and some may only toilet in the tray once before they expect it to be removed and/or cleaned.
- Litter has changed - changing the type of litter used can confuse your cat so introduce new litter slowly by mixing it with original litter to ease your cat into the change.
- You have gone on holiday or a new person has moved in - these circumstances can make your cat anxious and stressed and they may toilet anywhere.
- If the litter tray is placed in an area not frequently used such as a downstairs toilet or one off the laundry and guests come over, or a new person moves in, and the area becomes more frequented this may disturb your cat as new smells and activity may deter them from going into the same space to use the tray.
- Multi-cat households - some cats are more solitary than others and at first may not feel comfortable around so many others.
- There's a new cat in the neighbourhood - this can disturb some cats and they may feel a bit out of sorts for a while which may result in unusual toilet behaviour.
- Illnesses such as cystitis or bladder stones can cause your cat to toilet in places other than the litter tray. If you notice they are toileting in the bathtub, basin, sink or laundry basket, or you see blood in their urine, take them to your vet immediately. If you notice they are squatting repeatedly but little comes out it can indicate a blockage and you must take them to your vet immediately, especially if it is a male cat.
- Sometimes your cat may continue to toilet in the same places, and not in the litter tray. This may be a place where the smell of you is strongest.

If problems persist even after you've eliminated any physical or psychological causes, prevent their access to the area where they are frequently toileting, or place plastic sheets or aluminium foil over the area - cats dislike the feel and sound of these items and it will deter them from using the area. You can also try placing their food bowls there as cats will not toilet where they eat their food.

Using the Garden

- To train your cat to use the garden for their toileting add a few handfuls of earth to the litter to get them used to the smells and textures of the outdoors.
- Make it easy for your cat by digging up a patch of earth close to your door and praise them if they go there - later you can provide different patches around your garden.
- Still keep a litter tray inside too.



Food & Water

Each cat should have their own feeding bowl placed in an area that is safe, familiar and in the same location every day. Introduce any new foods gradually over a week or two to avoid digestive issues and mix in new biscuits with the original biscuits slowly changing the ratio.

- Fresh clean water should be provided inside and outside.
- Food and water bowls should be cleaned every day.
- Cats need a premium type food for energy, health and happiness.
- Premium dry biscuits are needed for their teeth; to clean them and make them strong. The nutrients in biscuits are generally higher than in soft foods.
- Soft foods should only be given occasionally and as a treat.
- Kittens need a special kitten food produced for high energy and specifically design for bone growth and healthy immune system.
- At 12 months the food can change to adult food.
- At 7 years old a senior food is appropriate as your cat will have less energy and therefore requires reduced calories and lower protein to decrease risk of becoming overweight. Senior food has higher nutrients to support bone structure.
- Milk should not be given to cats as most are lactose intolerant and it will result in diarrhoea and stomach upset.



How much to feed & when

- Kittens are growing and so need to be able to graze throughout the day and night as their high energy requires constant refuelling.
- Cats can sometimes be grazers too preferring this to eating a full meal all at once but be mindful of whether they are eating too much and don't refill their bowl if it's empty and they've already eaten their quota for the day. Overweight cats face the same health problems as humans.
- Rule of thumb: if your cat is slim, let them graze throughout the day, but if they seem to be gaining weight limit their meals to two per day.
 - To determine portions, use the guide on the food packet and calculate based on your cat's ideal weight - not their current weight.

If your cat is putting on weight and the calculated portions per day don't seem to be reducing their weight at all, try a 'light' feed for them and check that neighbours aren't feeding her/him either.



Resident Cats

Introducing a new cat into a household that already has one or multiple cats, it can take a few weeks or months for them to become accustomed to each other. To aid this process try the following ideas:

- Confine your new cat to one room with their litterbox, food, water and bed
- Feed resident cats on the other side of the door to the new cat so that they can get used to each other's smells during an enjoyable experience. After a few times leave the door ajar and monitor them eating calmly. If all goes well, when you introduce the new cat to other areas of the house the resident cats and the new cat will accept each other easily.
- Swap around the sleeping blankets or beds so they each become used to each other's smells.
- Let the new cat explore the rest of the house and its rooms on their own without the other cats around - they may need to be placed outside for the time or kept in a different room. This way they can experience each other's scents without confrontation, and it allows the new cat to explore without being frightened.
- Always monitor first meetings and separate them immediately if there are any altercations. You can expect mild aggression as they discover each other but don't let the situation intensify. If either animal becomes frightened or aggressive separate them and try again.
- If small altercations such as hissing, growling or posturing occur don't intervene (unless it escalates) but give them the opportunity to work it out themselves and calm down. Speaking gently and staying calm enables the tension to ease and diverts attention.
- Give your existing resident cats plenty of attention - after all, it's their home life that's been disrupted. And they could end up losing their favourite sleeping spot (your lap!) as the new cat settles there. Extra attention given to your existing cat will never be unwanted.



Have dogs at home or in the wider family? Find out how best to **introduce your cat to the dog** to reduce altercations.



For more pet information and products head to our website: www.nichols.co.nz/pet-centre



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