

Introducing Your Cat to a New House

Most cats are not big fans of change. If they could choose, they would prefer to stay where they're already comfortable and settled in. But, at some point in their lives, most cats must move on to a new location. Making the transition as stress-free as possible for your feline companion can have big benefits, including reducing the risk of fear-based house soiling, excessive meowing and crying, hiding, escape attempts and aggression.

Moving a cat to a new house involves three basic aspects: pre-move preparations, the move itself and settling into the new home. All three sections below apply to a move with a resident pet. The third section is most important if you're only trying to integrate a new cat into your existing household.

PREPARATION

- Allow your cat time to get used to his carrier. Leave it sitting out with the door open and a comfy bed inside. Occasionally leave a couple of cat treats in it so your cat can find them on his own. Start feeding your cat in the carrier. If your cat is reluctant to enter the carrier to eat, start by just placing his dish next to it. After a few days, put the dish just inside the carrier, right near the opening. Then, over a week or two, gradually move the dish toward the back of the carrier so your cat has to step a little further inside each day. Eventually, place the dish at the very back of the carrier so your cat must go all the way into it to eat.
- Put out your moving boxes a couple weeks before you need to start packing so your cat has time to get used to their presence. If your cat is nervous while you're packing, he'll probably be happier closed in a quiet room, away from the activity and noise. It's also a good idea to confine your cat if you think he might try to hide in one of the boxes.
- Try to keep your cat's daily routine as stable as possible. Stick closely to his regular schedule for feeding, play and attention. A feeder with a timer can be helpful to make sure your cat eats at the same time each day.
- If your cat is very skittish, nervous or easily stressed, speak to your vet about using anti-anxiety medication to make the moving process easier on him.

THE MOVE

- To prevent your cat from dashing out the door while movers are going in and out, close him in a bathroom with food, water, a bed and litter box. Place a sign on the door asking the movers to keep the door shut.
- Feed your cat a very small breakfast on moving day to reduce stomach upset. While in transit, resist the urge to open your cat's carrier to soothe him. A scared cat may try to dash out. Only open the carrier in a secure area and when absolutely necessary.
- Carry a roll of packing tape in case the carrier needs emergency repairs along the way.

SETTLING INTO THE NEW HOUSE

- First, cat-proof the new house. Tuck away electrical cords, plug up nooks where a cat could get stuck, make sure that all windows have secure screens, remove any poisonous have been left anywhere in the house.
- Immediately take your cat to a room that will remain relatively quiet. Before opening the carrier, set up your cat's food and water dishes, litter box and bed. Place some cat treats around the room to encourage your cat to explore.
- Keep your cat in this one "home-base" room for his first several days in the new house. This will allow him to gradually get used to the sights, sounds and smells of his new home without feeling overwhelmed. Keeping your cat in one room will also make it easy for him to find his litter box, food and water.
- Spend time with your cat in his home-base room, at first doing low-key activities like reading or watching TV. When he begins to explore, offer your cat attention, treats and playtime.
- When the flurry of unpacking is over, gradually give your cat access to the rest of the house, one room at a time. If it's not possible to close doors to limit his access, closely supervise your cat during short exploration sessions.
- Provide a second litter box where you'll want to keep one permanently. Keep the box available in the home-base room for at least a few weeks. Once your cat has settled in, you can remove that box. Alternatively, you can keep the homebase litter box but gradually transfer it to a preferable location. To make sure your cat doesn't lose track of where its, move the box just a foot or so away from the home-base room and toward your preferred location each day.

Source:

- ASPCA: <http://www.asPCA.org/Pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/cat-articles>