

FACTSHEET

Multi-cat households

At the Cat Protection Society, we believe two cats are better than one (*usually*; there are some cats who really prefer to be the only feline in the house!). By having two cats, you can ensure your cats are never bored, as they will always have a playmate, and if you need to work or leave the house the cats always have company. Just as people have their disagreements, so can your cats. Below we have put together some tips for keeping your multi-cat household stress-free.

Setting up your house for more than one cat

Cats can be very territorial, so when you decide to have more than one cat, you will need to ensure you provide each with their own space and items. Set up separate sleeping spaces for them. They may choose to sleep together but if they have a disagreement, they will need their own place to retreat to.

Provide each cat with their own litter tray and an extra one just in case. Some cats can be shy when going to the toilet so don't place all the trays together. This will also prevent any of them stopping the other cat/s from using the litter tray.

Food and water bowls should be set up with one of each per cat. You may want to separate the feeding stations to prevent fights at dinner time. Also, provide a few water bowls throughout the house as some cats don't like to drink where they eat.

Provide your cats with a scratch post each. This will help with the marking of territory and save your furniture. Scratch posts with multi-levels and platforms are great for homes with more than one cat as the levels give each cat an area they can sit on. Cats also like to be up high, so provide spaces throughout the house that give the cats access to higher areas. You might even consider installing a window ledge so your cats can look out.

If you have the space, consider setting up an outdoor enclosure for your cats to play safely outdoors. These can be built by you (see our factsheet on **Cat-proof fencing and enclosures**) or purchased ready-made and installed by professionals. The enclosures can even be made specifically for your home, with runs from the windows to the enclosure. Cat gyms and play centres are available to place in them to keep your cats entertained. Cat grass and catnip can also be grown in them to keep your cats healthy.

When is the best time to get more than one cat?

Ideally, adopt kittens at the same time so that they can grow up together, or adopt a pair of adult cats who already have an established relationship. At Cat Protection we do not break up bonded pairs of cats, and we also know which of our feline charges are friendly with each other, so we can help you to select a happy couple. If you already have a cat (or cats) and would like another, keep in mind their personalities as this will determine how the new cat will fit in. Research has shown a resident cat will get on better with a younger introduced cat.

Selecting the right cat or kitten

If you are deciding to introduce a new cat or kitten to a cat you already have, you need to remember a few things to help the cats get along:

- Look at your cat's personality. A quiet cat will not like a very boisterous cat being introduced to the house, and a very dominant cat will not like a similar cat being introduced. Don't rush into things: look at all your options and really think about the kind of cat that will best suit your household. At Cat Protection we can help you to identify a cat or kitten with the right personality to match your existing cat's temperament
- Don't ignore the cat or cats you already have. This will cause jealousy and may hinder your cats getting along. Always reassure your existing cat/s they are still loved and show them this with regular pats and hugs (if they allow it)
- Don't expect your cats to instantly bond and follow the introduction guidelines below. Just like people, cats need to get to know each other. Expect the occasional fight or hiss, this is just the cats establishing who is boss
- **Ensure your cats are desexed.** Undesexed cats (male or female) will fight more than desexed cats. This is due to them wanting to show their status. Female cats coming on heat will fight with other cats to show dominance and obtain a mate. Female cats can come on heat from three months old and males mature from four months. You can safely have your kitten desexed from eight to ten weeks old, but it is never too late. Desexing will also lower the risk of some diseases as your cat gets older
- Realise your cats might never be very close. Some cats love the company of other cats and some do not. It is impossible for people to perfectly predict which cats will get on with others. If you notice your cats don't seem to be near each other or avoid each other, don't worry, this is their way of living together. In situations like this, ensure your cats have enough space to have time alone if they want it. Although you may think they don't get along, they may still have a bond with each other. Many cat owners have reported that they had no idea how much their cats cared for each other until one died and they noticed how much the other cat/s grieved for them. Their friendship might not be demonstrative but still very close. It is also very normal for relationships to ebb and flow over time
- If you want advice or guidance, call Cat Protection for assistance. If you notice severe behavioural problems, seek a vet or behavioural specialist's advice.

Introducing your new cat to your other cat/s

There are a few steps to introducing a new cat or kitten to your resident cat. We strongly suggest the use of calming interventions during this period such as 'Feliway', 'Zylkene' and/or calming treats to help both cats adjust to the new surrounds.

1. **Scent introduction:** before you introduce your cats face-to-face, you need to let them become accustomed to each other's smell. Scent plays an important part in the life of a cat so this step is crucial. When you bring your new cat home don't wash your hands after playing with them. Go to your resident cat and let them smell your hands and clothes. They might hiss or back away. This is normal, as they don't know your new cat's smell yet. Do this a number of times over a few days. Do the same when you pat your resident cat and play with your new cat. If your new cat is contained in a room with a gap under the door, let your resident cat sniff under the door and vice versa.

- Feed the cats on either side of the doorway so that each cat is aware their food source is not threatened by the presence of the other cat. Once your cat is familiar with the other cat's scent on you, move to the next stage
2. **Scent swapping:** place an item like a blanket that your resident cat has slept on in the room your new cat is in and vice versa. After patting one cat don't wash your hands and pat the other cat. This will swap the two scents and help the cats become aware of each other without actually meeting. Once you notice the cats rubbing their faces on the other's scented object, move to the next stage
 3. **Restricted introduction:** the most important thing to remember when introducing the cats is that you don't want your resident cat to feel threatened or rejected. Place your *new* cat in a carry basket and carry them into the room where your resident cat is. Do not let the new cat out of the carrier at this stage. If possible, close off this room so your resident cat can't run away. Let the cats see each other and introduce themselves. Don't force the resident cat to get close; they will do this when they're ready. Stay in the room. Expect hissing or spitting from either cat, this is quite normal. Any excessive aggression shown by either cat should end the introduction session for the day. Continue this until no aggression is shown
 4. You can now let the cats explore each other in a room with you present to monitor behaviour. Slowly let the cats explore the house together
 5. **DON'T RUSH!** It is very important that you introduce your new cat to other fur family members slowly. You will need to make sure your resident cat is comfortable with your new cat before leaving the two alone together. Always ensure the cats have enough space to get away from each other if they need time out. Of course, some cats will bond very quickly. You need to be sensitive to the messages the cats are giving each other to make the right decisions about how slowly or quickly to progress the introductions – generally, expect the process to take 10-14 days but it can take months, or even years
 6. Remember to pamper your existing cat/s so they don't feel they've been replaced or are no longer loved
 7. It is important to ensure that your cats are confined indoors or there is secure fencing in place so your cat cannot respond to the new situation by running away. Even if your new cat is going to be an indoor/outdoor cat, you should keep them inside for the first month and always keep all cats indoors from dusk to dawn
 8. Finally, don't hesitate to call our welfare office if you need advice or would like to discuss your cats' behaviour.

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