

STARTING OUT RIGHT WITH YOUR NEW CAT

Environment

Your cat's environment Many cats are fearful when introduced to their new home. Being moved from a small enclosure to an apartment or house is a big change. Your home also has different smells and noises. Initially, confine your new cat to one room. Your bedroom often works well for this. Make sure that you provide your new cat with food, water, and a litter box (see below), and that you regularly spend time in this room with her, so that she is not alone.

Provide her with multiple hiding places. A cardboard box with holes cuts in both sides (so she can go in and out each side) and a blanket placed in the bottom can be a great hiding place. Be certain to provide her with hiding places on the ground, as well as up high. When she is in her hiding place, do not disturb her. Her hiding places should be her special places, where she can have privacy if desired.

Place a scratching post or cat tree in her room. Place her scent on the cat tree by gently stroking her cheeks with a towel, and then rubbing the scratching post with the towel. This will transfer her scent onto the scratching post, thereby increasing the likelihood that she will use it.

Let your cat adjust to the room, and to you. Do not force her to stay near you if you wish to pet her. Instead, coax her to you by playing with an interactive toy or staying near her food bowl while she is eating. Once she realizes that this stranger (you) provides all the same good things that her previous owner did (and maybe even more!), she will warm quickly to you and accept your attention.

After three days, or once your cat is comfortably walking around and living in this room, expand her access to the entire house. For some cats, it may take several weeks before they are comfortable in their room and can be allowed access to the whole house.

Diet

Cats eat less when they are stressed, and sometimes stop eating altogether. It is extremely important to make sure that your cat is eating regularly (and adequate amounts) once you have brought him home. If possible, buy the same type of food that you were provided at the time of adoption. If he is not eating, try mixing a little bit of a tastier food, such as canned cat food or baby food, into his meal.

Changing your cat's diet too rapidly can cause upset to his system (decreased appetite, vomiting, and/or diarrhea). If this happens, call your veterinarian.

Decide whether you wish to feed your cat once daily, twice daily or free choice (which always means leaving dry food out). Many cats who are fed free choice do not properly control their food intake and tend to be overweight, which predisposes them to health problems. For most cats, twice-daily feeding is ideal. You can also put some of your cat's daily ration into a food-dispensing toy. Food-dispensing toys are a fun way for your cat to "hunt" for his food and are a great way to enrich his life. Do not start using a food-dispensing toy until your cat has completely settled into your home, after about two to three weeks.

Litter box

Provide your cat with an uncovered, clean litter box. Covered litter boxes can trap odors inside the box, which is nice for you, but not for your cat. Cats are often quite fastidious; they are sensitive to the smell of urine and feces, as well as deodorizers. Reducing the smell inside and around the litter box can be very important for them. Scoop out the litter box once daily and empty it completely to clean it every two weeks. When you clean the litter box, use a mild soap, not strong-smelling detergents or ammonia. Once you find a litter your cat likes, don't change types or brands. Many cats are put off by the odor of scented or deodorant litters. For the same reason, it's not a good idea to place a room deodorizer or air freshener near the litter box. A thin layer of baking soda placed on the bottom of the box will help absorb odors without repelling your cat. You should have at least as many litter boxes as you have cats. You might consider placing them in several locations around the house so that no one cat can guard the litter box area and prevent the other cats from accessing it.

Toys

There are many different toys that your cat might like to play with. Cats like novelty, so buy several different types of toys for her and try them out. Play with the toys with your cat; do not set them out and expect her to play with them on her own. If she is not interested in them for the first few days, give her time, and try different toys. Do not play with your cat with your hands. Using your hands as a toy teaches your cat that it is okay to bite or scratch you.

For more information about pet behavior and training, please visit our website at michiganhumane.org.