

New Cat Handbook

Congratulations on your new cat! Now let's give your cat every opportunity for success in her new home. As tempting as it might be, do not give your cat the run of the house. Your house is just too big and all that space will be stressful for her.

What is the first thing to prepare?

Confine your cat to a small "safe" place like your bathroom or a small bedroom. A very shy cat should be confined to the bathroom only, where you can easily reach her. The ideal safe haven is small, quiet, and easy to close off with a door. This new safe place allows your cat to make a gradual transition to her new home. Visit her often to feed her, play with her and talk to her. Your cat will need to stay here with the door closed until she is completely comfortable with you and her new home which could take days or weeks. When she is comfortable, running up to you to greet you at the door and eating, you can gradually let her explore the rest of the house one room at a time (close off bedrooms and other bathrooms). Always make sure she has access to retreat to her safe room whenever she feels the need.



What items should be included in the "safe" room?

- Food (cat dry and wet)
- Treats (cat approved)
- Water and food bowls (stainless steel or ceramic—no plastic!)
- Litterbox and litter (place litterbox as far away from food, water, bed as possible)
- Interactive toys (fleece wand, Cat Catcher wand)
- Play-alone toys (jingle balls, soft mice, plastic rings)
- Scratching post or horizontal cardboard scratcher
- Cat bed
- Cubby bed, hidey box, or cat carrier

How should I introduce my new cat to the household?

Time, patience, predictability and routine are top of the list in helping your new cat adjust to her new home. Resist the urge to give her too much attention, instead let her acclimate at a feline appropriate pace--she will lead the way. She will need to first get used to her safe room and then to her new members of her family. Be calm and do not hurry the situation. Do not give her too much room too soon.

Safe Room Set Up

1. Take your cat to her safe room.
2. Open the carrier and let her decide whether she wants to come out to explore—she may come bounding out or it may take a few hours, days, weeks or more before she comes out of her safe carrier in your presence. Never pull your cat out from the carrier.
3. Visit often for feeding, litterbox cleaning and social visits but let your cat decide the pace of interactions. Limit the number of visitors who visit at once, so she isn't overwhelmed.

4. When she is comfortable, running up to you to greet you at the door, eating, and using the litter box, you can gradually let her explore the rest of the house one room at a time (close off bedrooms and other bathrooms). Always make sure she has access to her safe room whenever she needs to.

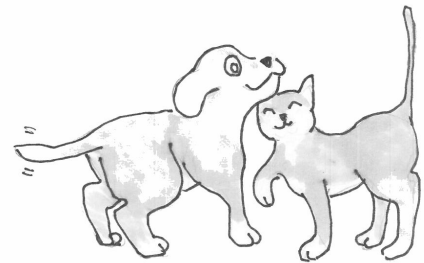


Multi-cat households

Slow introductions are especially important if there are other cats in your home—both for your cat’s safety and the acceptance of the new cat by your resident cat. For tips on introducing kittens/cats to each other, please see the handout [Successful Cat to Cat introductions](#).

Your Cat and Your Dog

Again, slow introductions are a must! The whole relationship will be built upon that first contact. Without proper and controlled introductions, your cat could become injured. If the flight response in your cat gets triggered, then predatory response in your dog may also be triggered – not a great beginning for your cat or dog. Please see the [Cats & Dogs – Living Happily Ever After](#) handout.



Bonding Time

- Food and treats
- Playtime
- Talking and petting
- Grooming

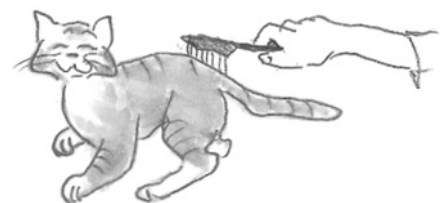
You are the “giver of all good things!” Begin by leaving dry food out for your cat and giving wet food when you come into the safe room. Stay in the room while she eats the wet food. She will soon associate you with the yummy food.

Play with her. Keep the level of play age appropriate (senior cats will not play as long and hard as younger cats). Homemade toys using cardboard boxes, paper bags (handles removed), and treats hidden in toilet paper rolls work as well as more expensive toys to keep your cat busy. Other toys that cats love include the feather, cat dancer and cat catcher and ribbon wands and kickaroos. Always keep safety in mind, and choose cat-safe appropriate toys. Put wand toys away before leaving the room.

The best time for petting and grooming your cat is when she is all tuckered out. They will enjoy grooming much more when they are not trying to chase down a jingle ball or bunny kick a Kickaroo toy.

Create a Routine

- Feed your cat at the same times every day
- Play with her in the morning and the evening (when cats are most active)



- Talk to, pet and groom your cat every day – taking into consideration how much interaction she enjoys
- Reward your cat for behaviors you like (treats)
- Pro Tip! Clean the litterbox at least daily, preferably 2 times/day

Nighttime/Bedtime Routine

Cats love routine and are creatures of habit. Even though they are diurnal (most active in the early morning hours and again at twilight), we can use their love of routine to our advantage. We need to shape their habits immediately. Since we don't always know the previous history of our newly adopted cat, we may find ourselves having to establish a routine that stops midnight antics and early morning bed pouncing with demands for food.

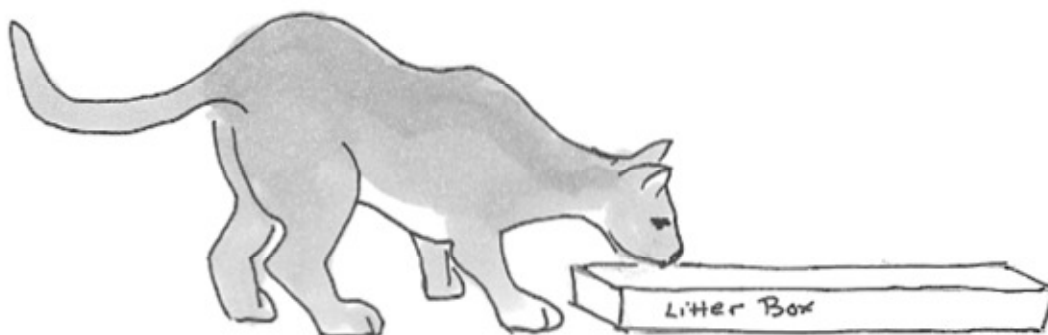
- Play with your cat every day at times that work for you. Play with her 30 minutes before you go to bed to tire her out and give part of the evening meal after the play session. Try to be as consistent as possible.
- Don't play in your bedroom—establish a special location for play (next to her cat tree is an ideal place).
- Pick up her toys and items she likes to play with at night and put them away.
- Place your cat in her safe room. Ignore her meows for release, unless you suspect an injury or illness.
- For more information, please see the [Early Morning Feline Antics](#) handout.



Litter Boxes

Do:

- Scoop the box every day, preferably 2 times a day —keep the litter box immaculate!
- Clean the entire box using mild (unscented) dish soap every 3-4 weeks.
- Clumping litter - use unscented.
- Have one box per cat, plus one extra.
- Two-story house—at least one on each floor.
- Use uncovered boxes.
- Place litter box in a quiet private area and away from food, water bowls and bedding.



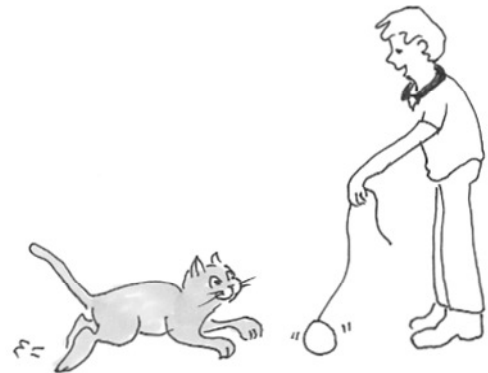
Don't:

- Use a box that is too small—it needs to be at least one and one half the length of your cat. Cats need room to turn around, dig and cover.
- Use scented litter. Smells good to you, smells bad to cats.
- Use a litterbox liner.
- Leave waste sitting in the litter box; nobody likes a dirty bathroom.
- Place a litterbox in a high-traffic or noisy area.
- Do not use strong chemicals or disinfectants to clean box.

Have Litter Box Issues? Call the Cat Behavior Advice Line at (415) 506-6284 or email catbehavior@marinhumane.org

How do I keep my cat happy through play?

- Play is using your cat's prey drive in appropriate ways. Get an assortment of "prey" toys so you can vary the game—toys that look like and mimic the movements of birds, rodents, insects, and snakes. Some cats prefer bird toys and some prefer mouse toys. You can mimic the various prey behavior with wand toys that you swing up in the air or drag and hide on the floor. Give your cat time to engage her mind and plan her attack rather than just swat at the wand.
- Never use your hands to play-box or encourage your cat to play bite your fingers. Always redirect play biting to a Kickaroo type toy, use a wand toy or throw balls across the room away from your body to redirect your cat to appropriate play.
- Make it fun. Allow your cat to make satisfying "captures" during play. For example, if using a wand laser toy, make sure to provide a treat or wet food at the end of the game. It is frustrating for your cat to never actually catch her prey.
- End the game by slowly winding down the play. This sets off the end of the hunt response as the injured prey slowly "dies", lowering your cat's excitement and energy level.
- Put all interactive toys away between play sessions as they should be reserved for playtime with you. Leave out jingle balls and furry mice that are safe for solo play.



Environmental Enrichment & Training: For ideas on how to enrich your cat's environment please see the environmental enrichment [Cats Just Want to Have Fun](#) handout or come to the Marin Humane's *Feline Environment Enrichment* workshop. For information on training your cat please come to Marin Humane's *How to Train Your Cat* workshop. See the [Marin Humane Cat Workshops page](#) for more information.

Veterinary Visits

- Annual checkups and boosters.
- Possible de-worming protocol
- Flea control

Medical Issues: Please contact your veterinarian if you see any of these issues.

- Not eating, drinking or using the litterbox regularly
- Losing weight
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Lethargic/stops playing
- Sneezing/eye discharge/nasal discharge
- Shaking her head/scratching
- Stops grooming/coat looks less healthy
- Straining in the litterbox/urinating in small amounts or blood in the urine
- Excessive vocalization

Should I allow my cat to go outdoors?

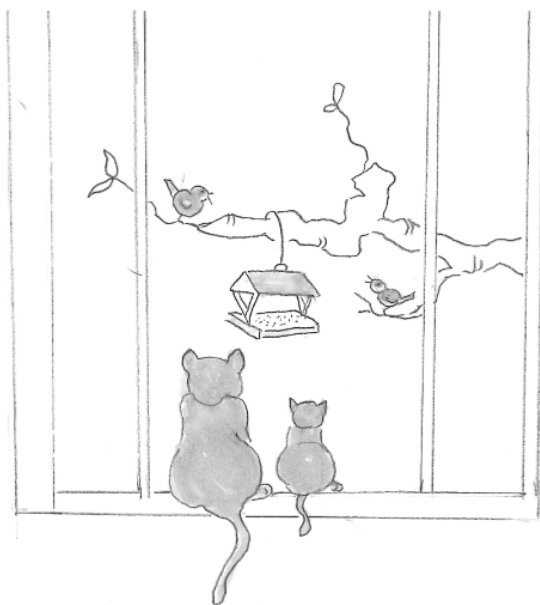
The great outdoors is full of natural stimuli but also full of natural and unnatural hazards. The easiest and best way to keep your cat safe is to keep her indoors and meet her innate feline needs. Your cat needs opportunities to work her body physically by stalking, hunting, pouncing, climbing, hiding, and playing. She needs to work her mind with interesting things to figure out and see. Fortunately, we can replicate many of the outside stimuli with environmental enrichment.

Outdoor Cat Considerations:

- Coyotes/dogs/other wildlife
- Hit by car
- Cat fights resulting in medical treatment
- Diseases (FIV, FELV)
- Parasites (ticks, fleas, mites, internal parasites)
- Chemical poisoning (rat poison, anti-freeze)
- Getting lost/stolen/mistreated
- Angry neighbors (cat fights, cats using their yard for a litterbox, etc.)

Indoor Cat Considerations:

- Boredom/Under-stimulation that results in:
 - Household destructive behaviors
 - Compensating behaviors such as over grooming, over vocalization, inappropriate play (biting, pouncing, chasing people in household)
- Indoor poison hazards



Door Darting and Preventing Escapes: Transitioning some outdoor cats to indoor cats may require a bit of thinking ahead on your part.

- Establish a hello/goodbye station **AWAY** from the entry door. Make this the place where all departure and greetings take place. Choose a happy spot like the cat tree. Distract her by leaving treats on the cat tree when you leave. When arriving home, walk directly to the tree and leave more treats.
- Make sure everyone in the household knows the hello/goodbye station protocol.

Cat Behavior – Pro Tips!

- Reward and pay attention to behaviors you like.
- Redirect behaviors you don't like (scratching furniture, etc.) to appropriate objects (scratching posts). Or redirect pouncing on your ankles to pouncing on a kickaroo or chasing a wand toy.
- Use management to avoid situations when your cat is misbehaving -- restrict your cat's access to the place, person or object.
- Never use physical punishment. The cat doesn't understand the correlation. She may see you as unpredictable and scary. Squirting your cat with a water spray bottle may stop unwanted behaviors while you are in the room spraying, however, it does nothing to prevent the behavior when you leave the room. A better method is to determine **WHY** your cat is doing that particular behavior and mitigate the behavior. You can do this by resolving her unmet needs, redirecting and/or training or managing the situation by limiting access. Come to Marin Humane's *How to Train Your Cat* workshop to learn more.
- Over-stimulation: Watch your cat's body language to determine her tolerance level to petting. Cats are like little energy sponges; they can only soak up so much and then "Poof". Sometimes these signals can be very subtle and easily missed. Staring, cranky meowing, ears twitching, ears back, tail swishing, and moving away from you can all be signs that your cat has had too much petting. If you continue to pet her, she will resort to more obvious signals to tell you to stop--hissing, striking or biting. Come to Marin Humane's *What is My Cat Saying* workshop to learn more.

Feline Resources:

We are here to help. Marin Humane's Behavior & Training department conducts various [cat workshops](#). Sign up on our Cat Behavior (MarinHumane.org/catclasses) page. We also have Cat Behavior Consultants who are available for private training or [consultations](#) (phone, online or in-home) at 415.506.6284 or CatBehavior@MarinHumane.org. More information about cat behavior is available on our website at MarinHumane.org/oh-behave/cathandouts/.

