Why two cats can be better than one
By Lisa Bloch

If you've ever had a cat, you're likely familiar with this scenario: It's around 4 a.m. and the kitty is hungry and/or bored. Moments later, you're pounced upon or that glass of water on the nightstand gets knocked over by furry paws. Think you've solved it by keeping your bedroom door closed? Ha! The feline will then unleash a full range of vocals just outside of it.

So, what's a sleep-deprived cat lover to do? Get another cat!

According to Petfinder, "Two cats provide each other with exercise, social interaction, and other forms of mental stimulation. Cats housed together have more opportunity to 'be cats' by socializing and playing with each other, and this means they are less likely to be destructive or engage in other problematic behavior."

And, of course, you'll have another kitty to love.

Many people think cats are loners but they're actually pretty social; they're just picky about their friends. That's why setting cats up for successful introductions with other cats is key. Patience and time are your friends as you move through each step of the process.

Start by putting the new cat in a room of their own, one where you can close the door. Ensure both your resident cat and the new cat are getting plenty of attention and playtime. The longer the two cats are isolated, the greater likelihood you'll have success with the next steps. Once the new kitty seems comfortable in their space (this typically takes several days to a week), you can begin to alternate the areas in which they're confined, so they get used to being in all areas of the home without the other cat(s) present.

Time is your friend. Moving too fast can result in a negative interaction that sets you back. Also, make sure you have plenty of resources for both cats. This includes lots of food and water bowls, litter boxes, toys, scratching posts and high vertical places to sleep. You want the cats to feel they don't have to compete with each other.

Your cat has 900 times the number of sense receptors you do, so both cats will be smelling each other through the crack under the door. Increase their scent introduction by switching their bedding or by giving each cat a toy or another item that has the other's scent. Always pair this exchange with treats or something yummy. That way, they'll learn that good things happen when they're exposed to the other's scent.

Once you sense both cats are comfortable, you can begin their physical introduction. Open the door between them just a crack. Watch for any hissing, growling, flattened ears, or any other unhappy behavior. Close the door if this happens and go back to exchanging scented items and treats.

Once they can see and smell each other without hissing or growling, move on to the next step: play! Start by playing with both cats at the same time, each with their own toy. Keep the play sessions short. If all's well, gradually increase the amount of playtime. Then, give them free time together, but watch carefully. If there's any potential bullying (stalking or hard staring), distract and redirect them with toys or treats. It'll likely take some time to get to the point where the cats can be unsupervised, but it's well worth going slow with the introductions.

With more cats staying safely indoors these days, it's ideal for them to have friends at home, if possible. And you may just get a bit more uninterrupted sleep.

Got kitty quandaries? Call Marin Humane's behavior and training department at 415-506-6284 or email catbehavior@marinhumane.org.

Lisa Bloch is the marketing and communications director for Marin Humane, which contributes Tails of Marin articles and welcomes animal-related questions about the people and animals in our community. Go to marinhumane.org, find us on social media @marinhumane, or email lbloch@marinhumane.org.