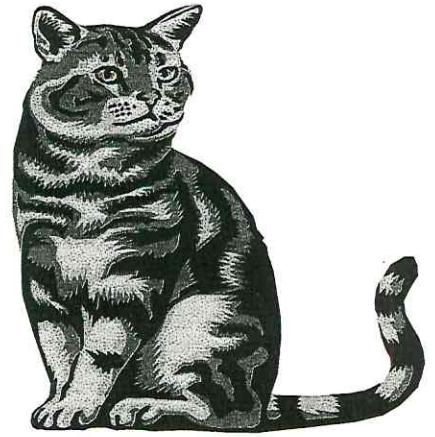


# Before You Introduce ... Introducing Your New Cat



A carefully planned introduction is everything. Most cats do not readily accept a new member of the family; they need time to get used to the idea. A certain amount of hissing, posturing and chasing is to be expected. It is important to have patience and not rush things along. Don't chance an all out fight; when in doubt, wait a few more days before proceeding to the next step. Preventing a problem is easier than solving one.

Several factors need to be considered and balanced in a planned introduction; among them age, size, sexual maturity, and personality. The period of adjustment and creation of a new routine can stretch beyond the normal 6 to 12 weeks. If enough factors are in conflict, the cats will become enemies rather than friends.

If this were an ideal world the New cat (N-cat) would be younger and smaller than the Existing cat (E-cat). N-cat would be of the opposite sex, and would be neutered. His personality would compliment that of the E-cat. You would take your time interviewing all candidates and would be rational, not emotional during the decision-making process.

The reality is that many times choice is not an option. Roommates, spouses with cats come as a basis non-negotiable package deal; the humans agreed to cohabitate, the cats will have to manage. This type of introduction can be rough. Be prepared for a prolonged introduction especially of the cats have lived alone since kittenhood and have no experience living with another cat.

Finding a stray on the street is another one of those unplanned events that can deliver a jolt to both you and your E-cat. Should you take him home just because fate put him in your path? A rescued stray must be physically isolated from your E-cat for 10 days to 2 weeks to make certain that he is not incubating a contagious disease. A cat with an unknown background must be thoroughly examined for parasites and disease, FIV and Feline Leukemia tested, and vaccinated by a veterinarian before he can come into contact with E-cat.

## The Isolation Area

All introductions start with the same basic rules. The newcomer, N-cat, will be isolated. The existing cat, E-cat, will have the run of the house except for the area designated as N-cat's isolation area. The isolation area should be a room with a door that can be closed so there is absolutely no contact between that newcomer and the existing cat. **You must be able to provide this type of space if N-cat is a stray.**

If the cat's health record is known and space is severely limited, provide a large cage with a blanket over it.

## PERSONALITY

If you want them to become friends, they have to be compatible. Sociability, lust for adventure, activity level and tolerance all play a part. The temperamental prima dona should be spared the offense of the spirited comic. A living lawn ornament will not appreciate a companion with the activity and energy of a small tornado. The cats should compliment each other not irritate each other.

## **Steps To Introduction**

### STEP ONE

Upon arrival, the newcomer should be brought directly into the isolation area. Don't stop to chat with E-cat. Remove N-cat from the carrier and let him scope out the room. Don't linger. Bring the empty carrier out with you. Put it down on the floor and proceed with your normal "just got home" routine.

Don't put the carrier down in front of E-cat. Give E-cat the chance to discover and explore the empty carrier and respond. Watch carefully, but don't interfere. E-cat's response to the scent of N-cat can be telling. Some cats will posture, hiss and may even attack the carrier (rough seas ahead) while others will stalk and growl, run off then return again and again (typical). Still others will approach curiously and sniff with great excitement (prognosis: good). Leave the carrier out until E-cat loses interest.

Spend at least an hour with E-cat. Resist temptation don't go back and peek in on the newcomer; he'll be just fine. He will need some alone time to explore; studies have shown that cats respond to environmental challenges before they respond socially.

When E-cat winds down, slip into the isolation room with a small portion of food. Sit quietly. Talk softly. Do not actively solicit the cat. He'll approach when ready. If he engages you, respond conservatively; don't rush forward and scoop him up. Remain a half hour to 45 minutes. Wash your hands if you've been petting, then leave without ceremony. Visit the newcomer several times a day in 1 hour blocks of time.

E-cat may begin to hiss or growl at you; you smell like the intruder and he's a bit confused. Continue with your normal routine. Note how much time E-cat spends sniffing around and sitting outside the isolation room's door. Do not proceed to STEP TWO until all hostile responses to the scent, doorway and carrier have ceased.

Be sure to spend quality time with E-cat. Talk to him; tell him that although things are not the way they used to be, he is still special. Play his favorite games. Groom him daily. Give him little bits of something yummy by hand. Make it intimate.

### STEP TWO

Now that E-cat is accustomed to the newcomers limited existence, its time to move forward. The next step will allow them to see each other without full body contact. Stack two 36' high tension gates in the newcomers doorway. Rigid plastic mesh baby gates are available at most children's specialty or department stores.

If you don't have a spare room, your bedroom or bathroom can be set up as the isolation room. If your cat is used to sleeping with you, you may have to use the bathroom. Remember, E-cat should be inconvenienced as little as possible; suddenly denying E-cat this basic level of companionship will complicate the situation.

If you're left with no choice, except the bathroom, and E-cat's litter box is currently located there, move the box to a new spot or create one with a privacy screen. If circumstances permit, do this at least two weeks before bringing the newcomer home. Planning ahead will minimize the chaos for E-cat.

The isolation area should be cat proofed and well ventilated. The simple set up should include a litter box, a food and water bowl and a cave like hiding box lined with something comfortable.

## **How Will I Know If He'll Fit In?**

### SMALLER IS BETTER THAN LARGER.

The visual impression made is important. Smaller is less intimidating to the E-cat. A physically smaller N-cat means that the E-cat will be less inclined to feel threatened. Size is based upon perception; length of hair and structure influence size.

### YOUNGER IS BETTER THAN OLDER

Cats go through the same developmental stages that people do.

An infant, birth to 12 weeks, needs lots of care and supervision; he is unable to respond in a coordinated fashion should he need to escape. He has no life experience to guide him in his decisions. He will make tactical errors. You must be there to help him cope.

A juvenile is a kitten between 12 weeks and 6 months of age. Full of energy and enthusiasm, he can be a downright annoying companion. He is busy testing both physical and social boundaries.

A cat between 6 months and 2 years of age is an adolescent. As the E-cat, he should be spayed or neutered before the N-cat arrives. A sexually mature N-cat should be altered ASAP.

The stability of adulthood begins to show itself at about 2. Cats over 2 have a fixed personality and may be somewhat inflexible. Cats in this age group should be carefully matched in terms of their sociability and activity level as neither is prone to easy compromise.

A cat over eight can begin to show signs of aging. He may be arthritic, sedentary and opinionated. As either the E-cat or the N-cat, you must be very careful not to stress him out. Ongoing anxiety can produce a variety of physical stress disorders, some of which can be life threatening in a geriatric cat. Check with your veterinarian if you're planning to surprise your 8+ E-cat with a companion.

### GENDER

A sexually immature cat is rarely perceived as a threat. A cat that has been spayed or neutered is not sexually motivated, less competitive, possessive and territorial. Male/female combinations are the best as a couple but won't make kittens in the process. Two unneutered males make for a volatile combination complete with chasing, fighting and spraying.

If you have reason to believe that either cat will get over the 6' gate set-up, use PLAN B: jam the door of the isolation room with two hard rubber door stops, one on each side with the door cracked open 2 to 3 inches. Make sure that neither cat fit his head through the opening. Check that the door is secure and will not suddenly pop open or slam shut if a cat body slams the door aggressively. They will be able to touch noses, whack each other with their paws and investigate without full body contact. When you are not at home or unable to at least peripherally supervise, close the door. Do not proceed to the final step until the cats seem relatively calm in each other's presence. Hissing, posturing and growling should be at a bare minimum.

### STEP THREE

Finally, you get to open the door. With E-cat occupied elsewhere, take down the gates or open the door. Don't make a big thing out of it. Let the cats happen upon each other. Stay on the side lines; don't interfere. E-cat may stalk and chase the newcomer; this is typical territorial behavior. The newcomer may do the same if E-cat enter the isolation room. Do not leave them unsupervised.

If a cat fight erupts, keep your hands out of it. Do not attempt to handle or pick up either cat. Clap hands and shout, bang a pot with a spoon, throw water, anything to startle them, but don't ever reach into a tangled mass of fighting cats. It always sounds much worse than it is. Cats yowl and scream, but if their nails have been trimmed prior to the EVENT, damage should be minimal. Declawed cats have no alternative except to bite. When things have cooled down considerably, go over each of their bodies carefully checking for damage. Bites and punctures wounds can become infected and abscess. Call your vet if you suspect that an abscess is forming.

The complete process can take anywhere from several days (kitten to kitten/juvenile) to several months ( adult stray to adult prima dona) ; a lot depends on how far you deviated from the IDEAL. You must watch for signs of stress. Eating food quickly and then vomiting, excessive grooming, sleeping and/or drinking are signs that someone is not happy. Spraying, indiscriminate urination and defecation, mewling and hiding behaviors are also associated with anxiety and stress.

Do not promote competition. Continue to feed in separate areas. Maintain the two litterboxes. Many E-cats have been known to block doorways and deny access to box or bowl. Don't be in a hurry to consolidate. If a cat can't get to his box, he will be left with no choice except to create a new toilet area.

Eventually, hostilities will decline. E-cat will stop the chasing and stalking and the newcomer will stop perching and scurrying along the edges of the room. They'll declare a cease fire. They will start to groom each other and share sleeping spots. At worst, you will have peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. Hopefully, they will become best buddies.

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