

# multiple cats in your household

## *basic feline care*

With some planning and patience, having multiple cats in your household can be a lot of fun. How do you choose your new cat?

### **Choosing a new cat:**

If you already have an adult cat in the household, a kitten might be your best bet. A kitten isn't as threatening to the older cat's territory and the introduction will go much quicker.

If you don't have cats but want to get two, try to get a pair that has lived together before. Or, get an older (4 to 6 years old) and younger (1 year old) cat. If you choose two kittens, they will grow up together as playmates and shouldn't have any adjustment problems.

If you get two adult cats, have them spayed and/or neutered. Two unneutered males in a household will not work. It's best if they are altered a few weeks before they meet to have time for the hormones to subside. If you bring them home together and introduce them, neither will have an established territory to defend.

### **The introduction:**

Protect your existing cat by taking your new cat to the veterinarian before you bring them home. Have them tested for feline leukemia and other contagious diseases. Make sure all vaccinations are current.

When your new cat comes home, put them in a separate room from your resident cat and shut the door. Provide your new cat with blankets and towels to rest on, their own litter box, scratching post and food and water bowls. Leave them home alone for a while so they can explore their surroundings. It won't



Developed with and approved by a qualified veterinarian.

take long for your resident cat to discover there is a new cat around, and both will be sniffing under the door to get acquainted.

The next day, bring out the towels and blankets your new cat has been sitting on and allow your resident cat to investigate them thoroughly. It may be advisable to have someone there to help you, as well as towels and blankets on hand in case the cats do not initially react well to one another. A few hours later, let your new cat out and put your resident cat in the room where they can explore your new cat's scent. Your new cat can now explore the house (and find all the hiding places) at their own speed. Switch them back, and the next day (if you feel they are ready), open the door to the new cat's room. Let them decide when to come out and get acquainted. Don't force them together—let them set their own pace. If things aren't going well, separate them and try again the next day.

You can also pet one cat on your lap, then change rooms and pet the other one so they get used to each other's scent on your clothes. It may take a few days or even weeks for the cats to work out the pecking order. One needs to be the alpha cat, and it is up to them to decide. Your interference will just confuse them. Don't be upset if there are a few spats with ferocious hissing at first. Unless it gets really violent, they are just testing each other.

Play a game with your cats together to help break the ice. A fishing pole toy or catnip will give them something else to think about. You'll find your older cat will become much more active with a new playmate!

### **Equipment needed:**

- Additional bowls
- Additional litter box (at least one per cat, plus one extra)
- Additional cat tree and scratching posts
- Additional cat beds
- Cat toys
- Catnip

### **More than two cats:**

Here's where it gets tricky. Overcrowding is the main issue, especially if your cats are indoors only. Two's company, three is often a crowd. Your cats may never do more than tolerate each other's presence and serious territorial disputes may develop. You need to decide whether or not there is truly enough room before you get more cats. In some cases, two cats never get along and you may need to keep them separated for a long period of time.

Watch your cats for serious signs of stress. Urine spraying, not using the litter box, serious fights, failure to groom themselves and feeding problems all indicate someone in your cat colony is unhappy. Cats do not tolerate stress well, and continued stress can weaken their immune system and cause illness. Spaying or neutering is an absolute must.

### **Keeping the peace:**

If they are allowed outside, multiple cats will do better since they aren't as crowded, but keep in mind that they will be exposed to many other dangers.

Plan on having at least one litter box per cat, plus one extra in a different room. This single step can help them adjust to each other faster. Add more cat furniture so there is plenty for everyone to stake out their habitat. Provide catnip and plenty of toys, and be sure each cat gets some attention from you every day.

If you have disputing cats and need to separate them, there are several options. A kitty condo is a large cage with shelves at different levels, beds and toys so they have their own homes no one else can get to. You may still have to shut the door of the room to keep other cats from pestering them. This is pretty extreme, and they will need the opportunity to get out and stretch their legs regularly. They'll also need personal time with you.

You can also build a kitty condo outside in a secure, fenced-in area attached to the house

so the cats can stretch out in the sun. A pet door allows them access. It's a good place to isolate a cat while tempers cool down.

You can almost always successfully add a second cat to your home. If you are considering adding a third cat (or more), plan carefully and be patient while your cats work things out. Plan ahead for alternatives in case they can't get along.