

# Multiple Cats in your Household

Basic Feline Care



## CARE SHEET

Developed with and approved by a Qualified Veterinarian

With some planning and patience, multiple kitties are 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 the best bet. A kitten isn't as threatening to the older cat's territory, and the introductions will go much more quickly.

If you have no cats, but want to get two, try to get a pair who have lived together before, or get an older (4-6 year old) and a younger (1 year) one. Or, if you choose two kittens, they will grow up together as playmates and shouldn't have any adjustment problems.

If you get two adults, have them spayed and neutered. Two unneutered males in a household will NOT work. Once they are spayed or neutered, it really doesn't seem to matter. 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 vet before you bring him home. Have him tested for feline leukemia and other contagious diseases. Make sure all documents are current.

When New Kitty comes home, put him in a separate room from your resident cat (we'll call him Old Cat) and shut the door. Provide him with blankets and towels to rest on, his own litter box, scratching post and food bowls. Leave him alone for a while so he can explore his surroundings. It won't take long for Old Cat to discover there's a new cat around, and both will be sniffing under the door to get acquainted.

The next day, bring out the towels and blankets New Kitty has been sitting on, and allow Old Cat to investigate them thoroughly. A few hours later, let New Kitty out, and put Old Cat in the room where he can explore New Kitty's scent. New Kitty can now explore the house (and find all the hiding places) at his own speed. Switch them back, and the next day (if you feel they are ready) just open the door to New Kitty's room, and let him 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 some 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)
- Additional cat tree and scratching posts
- Additional cat beds.
- Cat toys
- Catnip

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### More than 2 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 kitties will do better, since they aren't as crowded. But they are exposed to many other dangers.

Plan on having at least one litter box per cat, and maybe a couple of extras in different rooms. 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 territory. Provide catnip and plenty of toys, and be sure each kitty 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 Kitty has his own home no one else can get to. You may still have to shut the door of the room to keep other cats from pestering him. This is pretty extreme, and Kitty will still need the opportunity to get out and stretch his legs regularly. He'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, and get away from it all. 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. The majority of cats in shelters do not find new homes.

### Suggested Reading

*Cats For Dummies* by Gina Spadafori and Paul Diono, DVM, DACVIM

*The Complete Idiot's Guide to Living With a Cat* by Carolyn Janik and Ruth Rejnes

*ASPCA's Complete Cat Care*

*Shelter Cats* by Carolyn Commings

*How to Get Your Cat to Do What You Want* by Warren Eckstein