Avonvale

Veterinary Centres

Understanding Your Cat

Introducing a New Cat

Multi-cat Households

There are several things to consider if you are thinking about taking another cat into a household which already owns one or more cats. In the wild, cats often prefer to live alone, only forming groups where there are enough resources available to avoid competition. These groups tend to consist of related females, along with their offspring.
What kind of cat makes a good additional cat? Existing cats within a household are more likely to accept the introduction of a new cat if it is significantly younger than them. They are far more intolerant of same-aged or older 'new' cats.

Introducing new cats to the household

Before introducing a new cat, it is important to assess the likelihood that residential cats will accept it. An already stressed group of cats will not readily accept a new cat. Their existing problems should take priority. Improper introduction of cats carries a strong risk of fighting and long-term intolerance between them.

Proper introduction of cats is very important

General preparations for the arrival of a new cat should include:

The provision of a room solely for the use of the new cat, complete with its own litter tray or toilet facility, food, water and a variety of resting and hiding places. The installation of a Feliway ® diffuser in the room can increase the sense of familiarity and security.

Several extra feeding stations, places to drink and additional places to rest and hide should be provided for the existing cats. A Feliway ® diffuser is also useful hereto increase the sense of security.

The new cat must then be introduced to the other cats in a series of gradual stages. Cats primarily recognise other members of their group by smell, which is why cats sometimes react oddly to their owners after they have been handling or stroking other cats.

1. Scent Introduction

Prepare several disposable cloths, one for each cat in the household and keep in separate plastic bags labelled with the cat's name. Use the labelled cloth daily to wipe the face and flank of each cat in turn. This can be then wrapped around your hand as you go to greet, feed or play with the new cat as a way of briefly introducing the existing cat's scent. Once the cats ignore the scent as it is presented, you can move to step 2.

2. Scent swapping

Put all the cloths together in one bag, so as to combine all the various cat's scents, and use the cloths as before. Once there is no response to the cloths, you can use them to mark yourself by wiping them over your hands and legs.

3. Allowing the New Cat to Explore

The new cat should be allowed to explore and utilise the rest of the house while the other cats are excluded. This allows the new cat to learn all the hiding and escape places so that as the cats meet, it does not feel vulnerable.

4. Limited Face-to-Face Introduction

The cats need to begin to see each other, but without any risk of carrying out an attack. The best way to do this is to use a physical barrier, ideally something made from mesh or similar to allow some scent to be exchanged. The cats are encouraged to play and feed progressively closer to the screen, as long as there is no aggression. Once the cats are showing no aggressive or fearful behaviour, they can be allowed to meet face-to-face.

Tips for continued harmony

Scents

It is important to continue mixing odours between the cats and applying their 'group odour' to yourself and common marking places in the house until the cats have begun to rub against each other and groom each other.

Feliway ®

Once the cats have begun to rub against each other and groom each other, then Feliway® diffusers and other environmental changes may be taken away gradually.
The total time for the introduction process may vary from a couple of weeks to a couple of months, but there is no shortcut if harmony is to be achieved.

For more information
Please contact your Avonvale Vet

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