

Northern Oaks

Bird & Animal Hospital

Introducing a New Cat

Like humans, feline roommates do not always like one another immediately. Slow, positive introductions help produce a happy multicat household. Introductions may take days, weeks or even months to accomplish. Take it slow and remember that some cats may never acclimate to cuddling together. Always have both cats examined prior to introductions to assure no diseases will be transmitted.

- Begin by confining the new cat to a room in which your current cat does not spend a large portion of time for 4-7 days. This allows your current cat to maintain territory and habits already in place and your new cat to develop a sense of security in the room. This also allows the cats to be exposed to the sounds and smells of each other without physical confrontation. Exchange the cats' bowls and toys daily so they can come in contact with each other's scents. Rubbing each cat daily with a towel sprayed with Feliway pheromone may also be useful as this may aid in establishing a communal scent between the cats.
- Begin swapping rooms between the cats. Begin with short exposures from 15-30 minutes and slowly expand the time each cat spends in the others' room. The cats should not see one another during this time. This allows the cats to more closely investigate each other's scents and allows the new cat to find hiding spots in the remainder of the house.
- When the cats are no longer showing any aggression or anxiety in response to odors from the other cat, open the door and allow them to have only visual contact. A baby gate should be used to prevent them from physically interacting. A carrier may also be used to contain one cat, alternating which is in the carrier each session. Do not advance past this stage until the cats have ceased all defensive postures and sounds. (growling, puffing, striking, hissing)
- Once the cats have adapted, controlled exposure exercises can begin. Separate people should handle the cats on opposite sides of the room providing enough distance to minimize aggression. Give treats freely and engage with toys using highly desired toys, thus keeping the cats' focus off each other. A harness should be used to control distance while reward training is occurring. Over time, when no signs of fear or aggression are observed, the cats can move closer to one another for play sessions.

Northern Oaks

Bird & Animal Hospital

- In the final stage, the cats can interact freely for short, supervised periods of time. Over subsequent sessions, allow longer and longer sessions of interaction. If either cat shows aggression, calmly separate into different rooms and revert to an earlier training step.
- After 7-10 days of supervised interaction without aggression, begin leaving the cats unattended.

***PATIENCE is the key to introducing a new cat to the household. Rushing them to a level of interaction they are both not ready to handle will cause anxiety and aggression. This will result in a longer adjustment period or may prevent acceptance altogether.