BEHAVIOR

How to Introduce a New Cat or Kitten to Your Cat, Step by Step

Introduce cats in stages: a room of its own, scent swaps, meals and play at a closed door, a first look through a barrier, then short supervised visits. It can take days or months; move on only when every cat is calm.

By Catt County Cat Nippers • Reviewed October 28, 2026 • 6 min read • 2 cited sources

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The short answer

Don't put the cats together and hope. Give the new cat a room of its own, then introduce the cats in stages: scent first, then meals and play on either side of a closed door, then a look at each other through a barrier, then short, supervised time together.

The Feline Veterinary Medical Association (FelineVMA) says the whole process can take anywhere from a few days to a few months, sometimes longer, and to move to the next step only when each cat is comfortable with the current one. Pushing ahead while a cat is still tense can leave long-term tension between the cats.

AT A GLANCE

- Let the cats see each other for short sessions through a screen, a glass door, a tall pet gate or the new cat's carrier door.
- Go back a step if you see hissing, growling or swatting, or a cat hiding all the time.

The plan at a glance

INTRODUCING CATS IN STAGES

Stage	What you do	Move on when
1. Vet check	Every cat checked; the new cat tested for contagious diseases	All the cats are healthy
2. A room of its own	The new cat lives in a quiet room with its own litter box, food, water, bed and hiding places	It explores the room and isn't hiding all the time
3. Scent swap	Swap bedding and toys daily; then rub a cloth on one cat's cheeks and onto the other's	Neither cat hisses at, growls at or avoids the other's scent
4. Meals and play at the door	Wet food and short play sessions on either side of the closed door	Both eat and play calmly at the door
5. A first look	Short sessions through a screen, glass door, tall gate or carrier door	Both stay relaxed in sight of each other
6. Together, supervised	A few minutes in a large room with play and treats, a little longer each day	They share space without tension

From the FelineVMA and UC Davis introduction guides. Each cat goes at its own pace: if a step goes badly, go back one.

Before the new cat comes home

Have every cat checked by a veterinarian, and the new cat tested for common contagious diseases. The FelineVMA advises against adding a cat at all if your resident cat is in poor health, or is a senior with medical problems.

Then set up the house so the cats never have to compete. A shortage of separate resources is the most common cause of tension between cats, the FelineVMA says.

- [ ] One litter box, food bowl, water bowl, bed and scratching post per cat, plus one extra, each in its own quiet spot: three litter boxes for two cats.
- [ ] Hiding places and high perches for every cat.
- [ ] A transition room for the new cat, away from busy areas, with a litter box, food, water, a bed, a scratching post, toys and its carrier left open as a retreat.
- [ ] Each cat's favorite treats and games, to reward calm behavior later.
- [ ] Optional: the FelineVMA suggests plugging in synthetic feline pheromone diffusers in the main room and the new cat's room a day or two before it arrives.

This quick sheet is the start of the guide. Still to read: Week one: a room of its own, then scent, Meals and play at the door, then a first look, Together, supervised and 3 more sections, plus the New Cat Settling-In Planner. Read it all free when you join our pet health emails at cattcountycatnippers.org/articles/how-to-introduce-two-cats-guide

Sources

1. Feline Veterinary Medical Association — Step-by-Step Guide: Introducing a New Cat (PDF)
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