

Moving house with your cat



Moving house can be a very stressful experience for us, but it is even more traumatic for our cats. Moving away from an environment where the cat is surrounded by familiar sights, sounds and smells, to a house that looks and smells alien is a very unnatural experience for cats. There are, however, some things that you can do to make moving as stress-free as possible for your feline friends.

Planning ahead



It is important to consider the needs of your cat when deciding where to move. Is the new environment suitable for your cat?

Managed properties

Check that there are no local restrictions on keeping pets if you are moving into rented or leasehold properties, even if you see other residents with pets (policies may have changed). If cats are allowed, enquire if you can provide outdoor access eg a cat flap. Should you be moving into sheltered or retirement accommodation find out if you can take your cat with you well in advance of your move. Some retirement homes do allow pets so don't assume that you can't take your cat

with you. Ask about the pet policy of different homes when you are looking around, and you may find one that is happy to accommodate both you and your cat.

Freehold properties

Although there are no restrictions with this type of property, try to consider what your cat is used to when choosing your new home. Cats that have spent their whole lives in a quiet, rural environment where there are few other cats, are not likely to settle easily into a busy urban environment, or somewhere where there are lots of cats within a small area. Should your cat be accustomed to spending a lot of time outside, he may not adapt well to

living indoors in a small flat. It is also a good idea to visit your potential homes at a busy time of day to assess the risk from nearby roads at rush hour. If you have an indoor cat, can you modify the inside of your potential new house to make sure that he has plenty to occupy him, such as shelves to climb on?

Moving abroad

If you are moving overseas, you need to make additional arrangements. The requirements for health checks and vaccinations vary between different countries, so see your vet to discuss what is required. Some vaccinations require two injections several weeks apart, so sort this out well in advance of your move. Contact the airline or shipping firm to make arrangements for the physical transport of your pet well in advance, particularly if you want to travel to your destination at the same time as your cat. For information on passports for pets, contact the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR. Phone – Helpline 08459 335 577 or visit the website at www.gov.uk

If you cannot take your cat

For whatever reason, if you are sadly unable to take your cat with you, it is your responsibility to find him a new home (remember that as a pet owner it is an offence to abandon an animal). Make alternative arrangements as soon as possible by asking friends



and relatives, putting adverts in local newspapers, shops and veterinary surgeries. You will find it easier to rehome your cat if he is neutered and vaccinated. Should someone be willing to take on your cat, pay a visit to make sure that it is a genuine, caring home where your pet will be well looked after. Ideally it should be of a similar environment to which your cat is accustomed. Take him to his new home at least a couple of weeks before you move. See CP leaflet *Living in harmony* (580) for tips on how to settle your cat into a new environment. If for any reason he doesn't settle then you still have time to make alternative arrangements.



Foreign travel: Your vet will advise you on requirements for pet passports


If you cannot find a new home for him yourself, contact your local Cats Protection Branch, or other reputable rescue organisation, which will do its best to help you. They will, however, need plenty of warning (some have waiting lists of several weeks) to make suitable arrangements for your cat.

Before the move



You need to plan the move itself well in advance, so that it is as stress free as possible for your cat. You have two options:

 **Book him into a boarding cattery for a few days**

 **Keep your cat with you during the move.**

Both options require some prior thought and planning, including allocating a secure room at your new house where puss can relax quietly away from all the upheaval.

Boarding your cat

A stay in a reputable cattery for a couple of days may well be the least traumatic option for your cat especially if you have used the cattery for holiday times, etc. If you have not used a local cattery before or if you are moving some distance and want to board your cat near to your new home, check the cattery first to make sure that your cat will be safe and comfortable there. Unless your cat is familiar with dogs, it is generally better to select an establishment that boards cats only, as the noise of dogs barking can be quite stressful. Allow plenty of time to book your cat in and ensure his vaccinations are up to date, as you will have to produce the certificate. Contact the Feline Advisory Bureau (FAB) www.fabcats.org.uk for a list of approved catteries.

Keeping your cat with you during the move



Secure room: Provide a safe retreat away from the hustle and bustle

If you decide to keep your cat with you, carefully plan the removal day well in advance. Clear a small room of furniture making sure that this room is not one that the removal men will need to access, and that it has a lock, or some method of securing it to prevent your cat accidentally being let out. About a week before the move place your cat's bed, scratching post, litter tray, toys and (so it becomes familiar to him) his cat carrier in this room. Over the week also start to feed him in here, so that he becomes accustomed to it being a 'safe retreat' before the day of the move. He can remain here whilst you are packing, particularly if you are moving furniture or cases around, as these changes in routine and movement of physical items within his territory area are upsetting for your cat. The evening before the move, make sure your cat is in his room.

Even if he does not normally wear a collar, it is a good idea for your cat to wear a quick-release collar with his new address on for the journey. If you know that your cat is particularly distressed by travel, then seek the advice of your vet well in advance, as he may prescribe something to keep your cat mildly sedated during the journey. Most cats, however, travel better without sedation as they can become distressed by the resultant loss of control. For long journeys or if travelling overseas, you may wish to enlist the services of a pet courier company whose staff are experienced in transporting pets. A contact list is available from the CP Helpline on 08702 099 099.



Lock, stock and barrel:

Pack your cats' belongings last and in an accessible place



Moving
day



Let the removal men know where your cat is – they are usually very helpful about not disturbing pets.



Packing up: Take all his familiar items with you

Before the removal men arrive in the morning, feed your cat a small meal (especially if you have a long journey), clean the litter tray, and then lock the door, keeping the key with you so that the door is not opened by mistake. Let the removal men know where your cat is – they are usually very helpful about not disturbing pets.

Line the cat carrier with plenty of newspaper – many cats dislike travelling and may feel travelsick. Take the precaution of protecting your car seat with more newspaper and plastic sheeting in case puss has an accident.



On the move: Make sure puss travels in a secure carrier

Leave your cat in the house as long as possible, particularly if it is a hot day. Load up everything else first, leaving your cat securely in his room. Once the van is loaded and on its way, whilst puss is still in his room place him in the cat carrier (make sure he has his collar on) and take him to the car. Pack the food bowls, litter trays, beds and toys somewhere where they will be easily accessible at the other end – your cat will need these familiar things to feel at home at the new house. Just before leaving make sure your old cat flap is shut and locked, and that there are no other access points for other cats to come into your house, particularly if it is going to be left empty for a while. During the journey, keep your cat in the carrier – it is very dangerous to have a loose cat inside the car whilst you are driving.

Arriving at the new house



Settling in: A bowl of food will help him feel at home

Take your cat directly to the secure room that you have previously allocated. Unpack the food bowls, litter trays, beds, etc as these things will all smell familiar to your cat and help him to feel a little less stressed about being in an unfamiliar environment. Give him a bowl of food and a clean litter tray, and then leave him to settle whilst the unloading takes place. Again, make sure the removal men know which room to avoid, as you don't want your cat to escape. It's a good idea to leave him in this room for a few days. He needs to get used to it first and feel comfortable here before having access to the rest of the house. At any rate, leave the door shut at least until you have finished the basic unpacking, the house is reasonably straight, and you are less stressed.

Once your cat appears confident to eat, play, approach you and come to the door of his room, then you can gradually start to allow him into the rest of the house. Make sure all doors, windows and cat flaps to the outside are securely fastened. Ensure that everybody in the household knows the importance of not allowing the cat to escape outside during this period. It is vital that your cat feels relaxed and secure in your new house, and considers it to be the core part of his new territory before you let him out. In this way, once



he does go outside he will tend to run back to the house if he is nervous or scared by something. If you need to have doors or windows open during this period make sure your cat is back in his room before you do so.

Building confidence

Over time, your cat should become progressively more and more confident around the house, and start to behave as he did in his previous home. Some confident cats settle into a new environment very quickly, whereas this process can take many weeks for more nervous individuals. See CP leaflet *Living in harmony* (580) for tips on how to settle your cat into a new environment.



Room with a view: A window enables him to survey his territory

Watch your cat – when he appears to behave in a normal, confident way around the house, you can consider starting to let him outside. At any rate, *you should keep your cat indoors for at least two weeks* before letting him venture outdoors. If let out too early, he may try to return to his former home.

Venturing out



First steps: Encourage your cat to make his own way outside

The ideal time to let your cat outside is just before his meal. You can make sure he is particularly hungry by giving him a smaller ration for the previous meal. Open the door and encourage your cat to go with you. Do not carry him outside – it is better if he makes the decision to step outside himself. In addition he can follow his own scent back more easily if he makes his own way out into the garden. Whilst he is outside leave the door open, or alternatively, leave the cat flap tied up, so that he can easily get back inside if he is scared. When he's been in the garden for a short time, call him back in with his favourite food.

If your cat does not want to venture outside when you first open the door don't force him to go – let him have a good look and sniff, and then try again the next day. If the first expedition is successful, then you can start to let your cat out for a slightly longer period of time each day before calling him back for food. In this way he can gradually explore his new environment with the confidence of being able to come back in if he is scared.

Neighbourhood conflict:
Establishing territorial
rights may cause stress



Addressing his needs

It is a good idea to provide your cat with a ‘cat toilet’ in your new garden, and this encourages him to use your property rather than your new neighbours! Provide a secluded, sheltered area of well-dug, fine soil (add some sand or peat if necessary). Initially, add some used cat litter, as your cat’s own odours will encourage him to use this area. Bark can also be used – some cats prefer this to soil and it doesn’t make their paws muddy. The area must be turned regularly to remain hygienic.

Territory issues

One of the main problems for cats moving into a new neighbourhood is the presence of other cats already living there. Because cats are territorial animals, it is very stressful for them to ‘land’ in the middle of another cat’s territory, and, in order to establish a territory of their own, they often have to push back the boundaries of the territories of other resident cats. This can lead to conflict, sometimes including outright fighting, and you should prepare for this when first moving to a new neighbourhood. If you hear a fight, or you are concerned that your cat might have been fighting, check him over very carefully for wounds or abscesses, as these will need treatment by a vet as quickly as possible to prevent serious infections.

If you have a cat flap, be careful that other cats are not coming through. Your cat will be very threatened by this, and it could lead to changes in behaviour, such as toileting in different places, spraying, or grooming himself excessively. If you find other cats entering your new house, you may need to close off their point of entry for a while to break this habit.

Over time, your cat should establish himself in his new feline neighbourhood, and incidents of fighting and chasing should settle down. If he remains fearful of going outside, is persistently threatened by other cats, has a prolonged change in toileting or marking habits, or does not settle into your new house for a long time, then ask your vet to recommend a local behaviour specialist. They can give you some additional help addressing these problems.

**IF YOUR CAT HAS BEEN
MICROCHIPPED DON'T
FORGET TO INFORM THE
CENTRAL DATABASE OF
YOUR CHANGE OF
ADDRESS.**

Our thanks to Rachel Casey BVMS MRCVS,
behavioural expert, for writing this leaflet.

