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Moving house and travelling with cats

Cats bond strongly with their territory and can feel very vulnerable when away from home ground. Remembering this and planning ahead can help your cat to have a stress-free experience whilst travelling or settling into a new home.

Feliway

Feliway reproduces certain pacifying properties of natural facial pheromones. Trials have shown that when Feliway is applied to objects in your cat's environment it can reassure your cat and stop or prevent inappropriate marking behaviour.

Cats are territorial animals who mark out their territory using a variety of visual and scent marks. Pheromones are natural substances which play an important part in feline communication. You have almost certainly observed your cat rubbing its head on objects from the corner of the mouth to the base of the ear. By doing this, it is depositing facial pheromones. Applying Feliway to your cat's basket and to a new environment can help calm and reassure your cat during stress. We stock Feliway sprays and diffusers – just ask.

Moving house



Moving house can be a traumatic time for you and your cat. Owners have many worries about how their cat will cope and how to ensure that their cat does not get lost in the new environment. If the new house is not far from the old one, they may worry that the cat will return to old haunts. However, done carefully and with forethought, you can successfully relocate your cat with minimum stress.

Safety first

Put your cat in one room with all doors and windows closed early on the day of the move, so that you know that your cat is safe and can be found when it is time to go. Feed your cat in the morning but not too close to moving time in case of illness during the journey. Keep your cat in a basket on arrival until one room in the new house is sorted out and some of the cat's familiar belongings installed (such as bed and toys) and a litter tray and water provided. Make sure the doors and windows are kept closed and lock the door if you can, as this will help you to remember your cat is inside and prevent others from opening the door accidentally. Alternatively, a large sign stuck to the door may help. You can then get on with moving everything into and around the house knowing your cat is secure. Provide a meal and, if the weather is cold, a hot

water bottle wrapped in a blanket, towel or jumper which smells of you or your old house to make your cat feel secure. At the end of the day you can let the cat out to explore the house a little (make sure doors and windows are closed). It is usually best to confine the exploration to one or two rooms initially so that your cat is not overwhelmed and you know exactly where your cat can be found. It may be wise to board particularly nervous animals in a friendly cattery before the move and keep them away from the new house until everything is unpacked and settled.

Helping your cat settle in

Make your cat feel at home by helping them to furnish the new house with their scent. Cats will rub their heads and bodies on furniture, walls, doors etc to lay down scent from glands situated mostly on the head but also over the body. When a cat is feeling confident, they will rub scent around the house and this will increase feelings of security. Obviously none of these smells will be present in the new house and there will be various alien smells, which may make the cat feel insecure. Wipe a cloth across your cat's face to pick up their "personal scent profile". Dab this around at cat height in the room(s) where the cat will initially be kept so that the cat begins to feel at home and bond with the territory. There are manufactured scents available which work in the same way – ask us for details.

Use food and a regular routine to help your cat settle in. Small frequent meals will give you more contact initially and help to reassure your cat that all is well. By knowing when and where feeding will take place, the cat can anticipate the meal rather than worry about it. This also allows your cat to relax and promotes a feeling of well-being.

Moving home can be traumatic for an indoor cat that may not be used to dealing with changes in the environment to the same extent that an outdoor cat will be. Slow, careful introductions, one room at a time, with lots of reassurance will help the cat settle in.

Letting your cat go outside

It is important that the cat stays confined to the house for at least two weeks, regardless of how well you think the animal has settled in. This lets your cat bond with the new home and learn new geography and smells. When it is time to let your cat go outside, withhold food for around 12 hours so that the cat is hungry and watching you for signs of feeding. It is useful to have taught your cat in advance that a signal – such as tapping the food bowl or rattling the food bag – means feeding time. Go outside for a short period with the cat when it is quiet (encourage any other cats to leave the garden) and let your cat explore a little, then call the animal indoors for some food. Repeat this exercise several times, letting the cat go a little further and stay out a little longer each time before calling them back in. The cat should always have access to water and, if they are used to wearing a harness and lead, you can walk the cat on this until the neighbourhood becomes familiar.

Outdoor cats with wider experience of change generally cope well. Timid cats may take some time to adapt to their new environment and should be accompanied outside as much as possible to begin with, until they build up confidence. Ensure your cat has some form of identification (the type of collar that snaps open is the safest) with name, address and contact phone number. It is also advisable to have the cat microchipped. If already "chipped", remember to inform the company that holds your cat's data of any changes of address and/or phone number.

Preventing cats from returning to their old home

If your new home is only a few streets or just a couple of miles from the old one, your cat may encounter old routes while exploring the area and return "home" to the previous house along these routes. If this happens, the bond with the new home is simply not yet well enough established to break old habits. Some cats are inadvertently encouraged to stay by the new

occupiers of your old house. They may provide food or are flattered by this strange cat's confident entrance through the cat flap and its willingness to set up home with them. It is wise to warn the new residents that this may happen if you are not moving far, and to ensure that they do not encourage your cat to stay – ask them to chase the cat away or to call you so you can go and collect the cat. However, if this behaviour persists there are some things you can try:

- Keep your cat indoors at the new house for about 3 – 4 weeks. Feed small frequent meals and give lots of attention to build up the bond between you. Establish some routines and signals concerning food and feeding time that your cat cannot resist. In this way the animal may be programmed to return to your new house in time for meals – hunger provides strong motivation.
- Make your cat feel at home by helping to furnish your new house with your cat's familiar scent (see earlier).
- Ensure that no-one (new owners and previous neighbours) encourages your cat to stay around your old home. When you do decide to let your cat out, withhold food for around 12 hours so that food is on your cat's mind.
- For the first couple of weeks, let the cat out for one period only each day just before feeding so that the cat is motivated to stay around. The aim is to make the new home the centre of the new territory, which smells secure and is the source of food and shelter (in contrast to the old home where these things are now denied). It may take weeks and, in some cases, months before your cat can be allowed outside unattended.

Travelling with your cat

Transport your cat in a safe container (ie a robust and properly constructed cat basket or carrier) – cats may escape from cardboard carriers. Secure the container in the car with a seat belt or in the well behind the seats, or wedged in safely at the back so it cannot move around. Never transport the cat in the boot or loose in the front foot well of the car or in the removal van if moving house.

On a long journey it is wise to stop and offer your cat water or a chance to use a litter tray, although most cats will probably not be interested. If it is a hot day make sure the car is well ventilated and never leave the cat inside a hot car if you stop for a break. If a short stop is unavoidable, ensure the carrier is absolutely secure and always leave the car in the shade with a window open. Be aware how quickly it can heat up if the sun is on it. Do not forget the sun's position moves and what was shade an hour ago may be in full sunlight by the time you get back. Ensure your cat is wearing a snap type safety collar and tag containing both your new and old addresses and contact numbers and that your cat is healthy before you travel. If you want to discuss the relocation or if you just want to make sure your cat is healthy prior to the journey, please speak to one of us. Feed your cat as far in advance of travel as possible. Alternatively, you may wish to wait until you arrive at your destination.

