

Helping Your Cat Cope With Change

At one time or another, cats, like people, have to cope with changes in their lives. These tips can help you make the new experiences more pleasant for your pet.

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Many owners report that their younger cats cope better with new experiences and changes than older ones do. Genetic tendencies and the degree of early experience with change are probably important factors in why some cats deal well with change and others do not. Adult experiences are influential, too. Whatever your cat's coping ability, these guidelines can help your cat deal with change.

1. Cats seem to cope better with new experiences if exposures are gradual and brief.
2. New experiences should be as pleasant as possible, by associating them with treats, play and petting. Cats should not be forced to experience things that might frighten them.
3. Pleasant experiences during kittenhood (as young as five or six weeks) can have long-lasting effects. This way, they are less likely to be fearful and more likely to cope better later in their lives.
4. In general, the more varied experiences the cat has during its lifetime, the better it can cope with change.
5. In cases where the cat must experience sudden, unpleasant changes, anti-anxiety drugs may be helpful (given under the supervision of your veterinarian). Drugs are not a long-term solution to adapting to unpleasant experiences but they may help with short-term adjustment.
6. Helping cats adjust to environmental changes requires a different approach. During a move, for example, it may be good to shield the cat from the commotion. Maintaining the cat's routine may help with acclimation to the new surroundings.
7. Introducing cats to other animals needs to be a slow process. Conservative introductions are always best, because a bad first encounter can have long-lasting effects. Owners should carefully evaluate their older cat's life histories, their previous responses to other cats, how playful they have been and their current health status to determine whether introducing another animal is a good idea.

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