



Feline Stressors

Cats are creatures of habit and can be easily upset by what we perceive to be minor changes in their lifestyle, routine or environment. A stressed cat can present with many clinical problems such as urinary tract disease (cystitis), over-grooming, aggressive behaviour or becoming withdrawn; all of which can compromise a cat's wellbeing. Here are some hints and tips on how to try and keep your cat stress-free.

Consider what your cat was socialised to.

The 'socialisation window' – the time in which a cat is forming its view of what is normal in the world – is between 3 and 7 weeks of age. This early experience can shape how a cat deals with the world. For example, a farm-bred feral kitten may struggle with the transition to an indoor-only house cat. It is not always possible to know what a cat experienced during this time, but where possible it is important to consider when acquiring a kitten. Adult feral cats cannot be re-socialised, so it is inappropriate to try and convert one into a house cat.

Am I mixing multiple cats together?

Evolutionarily, cats are solitary, territorial hunters and will defend a preferred territory from others, often resulting in conflict. If cats are introduced to each other at different life stages you need to be prepared for them not to get along. Cats do not need other cats for company, and in fact many suffer by having to share their household with another cat. Indicators that your cats are genuinely friends include sleeping in the same bed together and grooming each other. In many multi-cat households, the individual cats will establish their own territory, allowing them to tolerate, rather than benefit from, the company of other cats. Pheromone plug-ins can help to reduce multi-cat household conflicts.

Cats primarily depend on smell, not sight, to identify friend, foe or food.

Cats rely heavily on pheromones released from scent glands on the forehead, cheeks, tail base and paws and they spread these by rubbing and scratching surfaces. If these scents are disrupted, they may use urine to scent-mark as well. In the wild cats would urinate in lots of different places, so if we want them to use a single location (e.g. a litter tray), we must keep it clean, as a cat may not want to use it if it has already been used that day. A cat will be even more reluctant to use a litter tray than has been used by another cat. As a general rule, we would recommend one more litter tray than the number of cats in the household.

Whiskers Vets has been awarded the 'Cat Friendly Clinic' status. If you are concerned about stress in your cat or are planning to introduce another cat into your household, we recommend a consultation with one of our vets, or with our 'cat advocate' nurses to discuss how to help.