

Dear Dr Catt,

We have a five year-old domestic shorthaired who, at the best of times, is a little neurotic. We're going to be moving house in the middle of next month and we're dreading the problems we have with her. She can't cope with moves and pulls out her fur for days afterwards. It's awful and the poor thing ends up with angry, raw patches of skin exposed. Is there any thing we can do to minimise the impact the move will have on her. We'll look at anything to help her through it. Any hints on acclimatising her to her new home and surrounds would be really helpful.

Moving house can be one of the most stressful events in the life of a cat (and let's not forget the poor owners!), as cats tend to be very bonded to their environment. There are a number of steps you can take to minimise the stresses involved with both the physical moving of your cat, and settling them into their new home.

Some people find it easier on both Puss and themselves to have the cat boarded for a couple of days during the move itself, especially if packing and moving will be very time consuming and the cat is highly strung. Most cats are fine to stay at home during this time, but it is worth keeping them confined to one room during the move, with the door closed and with their carrier, litter tray, water and food bowls and a bed nearby. Try to make it a room they are familiar and comfortable in, for instance a bedroom. Before packing that room up for the move, place the cat in the carrier, and take them to the car ready for transporting to the new home. If you can keep calm yourself, it will help minimise the anxiety for all concerned.

It may be worth speaking to your vet about prescribing a travel sedative if she gets particularly agitated, as this may make the transition easier.

When getting to the new house, again confine her to the one room, with her bed etc as before. Having the furniture in place beforehand is ideal, as is having someone she is close to stay with her for a time, while she starts to explore the room. Once the move is finished, and your cat looks comfortable in the room she is in, allow her to explore the rest of the house, with you in attendance. It may be worth

Cat vet questions

Melissa Catt BVSc
Paddington Cat Hospital

Melissa graduated from the University of Sydney in 1990. She worked in a private small animal practice in Adelaide for two years and then in England for a further two years. Melissa continued in private practice on her return to Sydney before starting Paddington Cat Hospital with her husband, Randolph Baral in 1997. Melissa is interested in all aspects of feline medicine and has a particular liking for soft tissue surgery. Of course, Melissa was nominatively destined for feline medicine.

183 Glenmore Road, Paddington NSW 2021
Phone: (02) 9380 6111
Website: www.catvet.com.au



planting her scent in the rest of the house before this by rubbing a tissue or soft cloth over her face (including where the scent glands are beside her mouth), and then wiping the cloth on door jambs and chair legs at the height of the cat's head, so there are already some familiar smells around. If you cat has outside access, then make sure you keep her inside for a couple of weeks before letting her out, and then only for short times when you're there with her.

A product we have found particularly useful for stressed cats (and cats in stressful situations) is called Feliway, available from the vet. Feliway is a synthetic facial pheromone which comes as a spray or a diffuser (similar to the plug-in mosquito zappers). Having both products would be ideal, as it is a great idea to have the diffuser already plugged in and turned on in the room she will be introduced to first (preferably at face height and in an exposed spot), and the spray can be used in her carrier before travelling, and then in spots around the house as she is allowed to explore. We have found Feliway very successful with most of our anxious cats, and in fact I would suggest using it for any cat about to have a particular stress in their life, for example moving house or the introduction of another cat or a new baby.

If your cat has a tendency to pull out her hair when moving to a new house, I would also recommend that you have all flea treatments completely up to date before moving so that a potential flea problem doesn't exacerbate the situation. Make sure you have vacuumed the place thoroughly while still empty of furniture, and ensure your cat has had one of the good quality spot-on flea formulas applied within the past couple of weeks (flea eggs can sense vibrations and hatch when a place becomes newly occupied).

As a last resort, there are medications that your vet may consider prescribing in the short term, if Puss still seems very anxious despite all your precautions.

I wish you both the best of luck; hopefully all will go smoothly and you will enjoy your new home together!



Dog/small animal questions

Dr Adam Gordon
Maroubra Veterinary Hospital

Adam Gordon graduated from the University of Sydney in 1990. He completed a Masters degree in Veterinary Studies at Murdoch University in 2002. Adam has been in companion animal practice since 1990 and is principal of Maroubra Veterinary Hospital.

88 Bunnerong Road, Pagewood NSW 2035
Phone: (02) 9344 8722
Website: www.maroubravet.com.au



One of the questions I am most often asked by pet owners is how old their pet would be in 'human years'. There is a sense of wonderment as we watch our pets age at a rate much greater than we do. However the real significance of this ageing process is often overlooked. It is not only the age in 'human years' that is important when considering the care we need to provide our pets. Of equal or even greater importance is the fact that because our pets age more rapidly than us, many changes can occur to their body in a relatively short space of time.



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