



Tips for Making the Transition

www.catsandbirds.ca

Congratulations taking the plunge! Now that you've decided to keep your kitty from roaming unsupervised outdoors, here are some tips to help you with that transition. Depending on your cat, it can be tough, but most cats adjust within a month, two at most. Cats are more trainable than most people think. They're not like dogs – our approval is not sufficient reward – but they can be trained. Once you've done it, you'll be able to rest easier, knowing that your cat is safe from outdoor perils, and that you're keeping local wildlife safer too.

Many cat experts suggest that a gradual approach to transitioning a cat to indoor life is best. If your cat normally spends most of her time outside, bring her in for increasingly longer visits. It might be helpful to time this transition period to coincide with the weather getting colder, since most cats prefer warm, dry places.

If you intend to provide your cat with controlled access to the outdoors, such as in a cat enclosure or leashed walks, you may want to introduce that first. See our resources on [cat enclosures](#) and [leash training](#). Having some access to the outdoors eases the transition for some cats.



If, however, your cat is determined to escape, you may have to just say no to going outdoors. For some cats, it's better to go cold-turkey.

If your cat isn't already spayed or neutered, consider doing it before you make this transition. Not only will it decrease the likelihood of cancer in female cats, it will also prevent her from going into heat, with the associated yowling and desire to go outside. With male cats, neutering decreases aggression, spraying and the desire to roam.



The next step is to enrich the indoor environment. The more opportunities for stimulation you give your cat, the less they'll want to go outside to seek excitement there. Some tips for enriching your cat's space:

- A window perch: place a cat shelf right next to a properly screened and secured window, allowing your cat to survey the

great outdoors from the safety of home. There are instructions to build your own [here](#).

- Cat furniture: Cat trees, cat gyms and cat condos provide your cat with stable places to climb and perch, adding more space to her territory. Cats especially height, and providing them with a climbing surface increases the size of their territory.

- Scratching posts: Scratching is a natural behaviour for cats. They scratch to remove the dead outer layer of their claws, to mark their territory, to stretch and to work off surplus energy. Because scratching is natural, it's important to provide places for your cat to scratch, as opposed to trying to eliminate the behaviour. (That's why the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association has taken a position against declawing as a solution for scratching. Click here to view that [position statement](#).) Observe where your cat scratches -- a soft or hard surface? vertical or horizontal? your new couch or your new carpet? -- and choose or build a scratching post that most resembles their preference. If your cat is scratching inappropriate objects, cover them with something the cat will find unappealing, such as double-sided tape, aluminum foil, or sheets of sandpaper. Place the new scratching post near the inappropriate one and let both remain there until your cat is consistently using the new post. After a few weeks, the coverings on the inappropriate objects can be gradually removed.
- Cat toys: Try a variety and see which ones your cat prefers. Store the toy collection out of sight and give your cat a few at a time. Rotate them every few days to provide variety and keep your cats interest. There are lots of interactive and puzzle toys that can be especially effective, but a simple cardboard box or a paper bag can provide hours of kitty entertainment! You can also hide toys for the cat to find on his own.

- Interactive play is a great way to keep your cat entertained while strengthening the bond between you. By encouraging her to leap and pounce and run around the house, you can help your feline stay fit.



- Training your cat to do tricks provides stimulation and cultivates a stronger bond between you and your cat. Find more information on [cat training basics](#).

- Catnip can help too! Try it and see if your cat responds – not all cats do. If he does, use it in toys or just sprinkle it around occasionally. Sometimes honeysuckle works for cats that don't respond to catnip. Cat grass (also known as oat grass or wheat grass) is helpful as well.

- Consider getting your cat a playmate. This generally works better for younger cats – not all cats appreciate having another cat around — but it can also enhance the quality of life of some older, more sociable cats.

A last word: It's likely your cat will go through a period of meowing at doors and windows. There's no easy way out of it, but as long as her demands are never met, she will eventually adjust, normally within a month. Remember that you are trying to keep her safe, and that the most important thing is that your cat learns meowing doesn't get her anywhere. Don't give in!