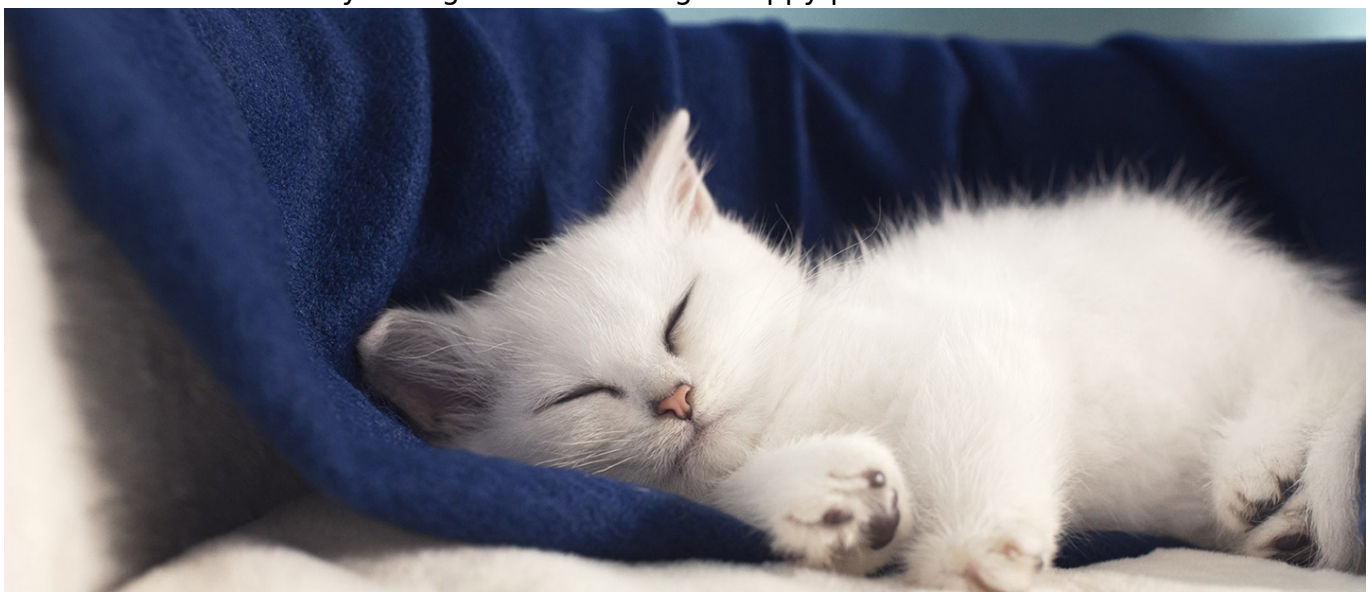
How to ease cat anxiety: Our guide to creating a happy place



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Our feline friends bring us much joy, so it’s natural that we cat owners want to do everything we can to stop them feeling nervous, stressed or anxious. The good news is we can do a lot to keep our furry friends calm and content just by making sure our homes are a happy place for them. None of this is difficult - it just means we need to spend a little time thinking like a cat.

Look out for the signs a cat is stressed

Before we get into making sure our homes are happy places for our cats, let’s look at spotting signs they are anxious. These might include:

- Avoidance (looking, turning or moving away)
- Tense posture
- Dilated pupils
- Restlessness, pacing, circling
- Vocalising more
- Eating or drinking less
- Sleep disturbance

- Being less tolerant of people
- Reluctance to use the litter tray, go through the cat flap, or be petted
- Over grooming
- Inappropriate toileting
- A scruffy/matted coat
- Aggression

Now we've identified some of the common signs of cat anxiety, let's take a look at how to make your home somewhere they feel calm and happy.

Put your cat's main resources in the right place

Your cat's food and water bowls, litter boxes, beds and hiding places need to be in quiet, undisturbed places. You'll also want to make sure that litter boxes aren't placed too near food and water. Cats don't like going to the toilet next to where they eat (and who can blame them?). It's also a good idea to provide multiples of all these key resources. Cats will appreciate the choice, whether that's which litter box they fancy using or which bed they're going to take a nap in.

Want to stop your cat getting stressed? Make sure their litter box is always clean and fresh

Cats are very clean animals and have a highly developed sense of smell. That's why they won't go near a litter box that's even faintly whiffy. Check out the 4 things you need to know about keeping a cat litter box clean and choose a high-quality cat litter such as Catsan.

How can you keep your cat happy? Be predictable!

Consistency matters to cats, so it's a good idea to try to feed them at the same time every day and keep to a routine where possible. If there are rooms in your house you don't want your furry friend to access, try not to chop and change this. Your cat won't understand why they're allowed in the kitchen one day and not the next, for example - even if you explain you're throwing a dinner party!

Try to avoid change

This is a close cousin of the above. The bottom line is cats tend to be very sensitive to any disruption to the norm, whether that's a relatively small change like you moving their litter box or a bigger one like a house move. Of course, sometimes in life change can't be avoided. You might want to get new carpet even though that displeases your feline companion. The house might be noisier or busier than usual. So avoid change where you can (that litter box can stay right where it is!) and, when you do need to introduce change, do it as gradually as you can. Instilling confidence and trust in your cat will build on the bond between you.

Safety-proof your home

As well as making sure your home isn't a place your cat feels stressed, you'll obviously want to make it safe for them. Cats are curious creatures who love exploring so if you're a

new cat owner, you'll need to make sure your home is safe. This means locking away anything that could be hazardous like cleaning products and ensuring you don't have any flowers or plants that are toxic. It's also worth bearing in mind that some human foods are dangerous to cats. Coffee, citrus fruits and grapes to name but three examples.

Want your cat to feel comfortable around you? Let them take the lead

As many of us cat lovers know, it's a myth that cats are unfriendly. However, how much a cat does or doesn't like to be petted or played with will vary according to your feline friend's personality - and mood, as well as how you, and others, interact with them! If they are visitors or a new addition to the family, it's best to let your cat dictate the pace and not force them to interact. And don't miss the tips in How to get a cat to like you.

Natural behaviour should be encouraged

Scratching objects and jumping up are both natural feline behaviours, and they are important for things such as claw health and scent marking. That doesn't mean you have to accept that your silk curtains get climbed up or your sofa has claw marks all over it. Rather that you provide appealing alternatives such as scratching posts or climbing trees. It's also important you don't punish these normal instinctive behaviours as this will just damage the relationship you have with your cat. So, if you find your furry friend clawing at the sofa, don't tell them off, but instead redirect them to their scratching post.

Cat acting nervous? Make sure they have hiding places

In order for them to feel safe, cats need quiet places they can escape to and not be bothered. This is particularly important if you have young children, unfamiliar people or other animals in the house or during hectic periods such as Christmas.

Offer a room with a view

Cats are curious creatures and love to look out of windows so if you can create a 'perch' in the form of a windowsill or shelf, that will be hugely appreciated. Planting flowers that will attract the birds and the bees will provide further enrichment for your furry friend.

Don't forget about playtime

Playtime is excellent for your cat's mental and physical health. Some cats will prefer to play with people, others with toys and others may enjoy a bit of both. There are a huge range of different toys on offer, from ones that encourage your cat's hunting instincts such as wand toys, to catnip ones. Experiment to find out which toys your feline friend likes best. It can also be fun to mix things up from time to time, hiding toys out of the way for a while and offering some new ones.

Feeding time can also be fun time

If you want to offer your cat a side portion of mental stimulation at mealtimes, why not try

a puzzle feeder? These come in a range of different shapes and sizes. Not only are they a great way of getting your furry friend to work for their food and stimulating their natural predatory instincts, but they also help slow down cats who tend to gobble their meal.

Think about cat-friendly house plants

Your furry friend will be delighted if you have some suitable houseplants around for them to sniff and chew on, with catnip and cat grass being particular favourites. It's also crucial you don't have any houseplants that are poisonous to cats.

The great outdoors

Cats are natural explorers so if you're lucky enough to have a garden and feel happy allowing your cat outside access, you'll want to make sure your outside space is safe and stimulating. As with indoors, you cat will appreciate having places to hide, places they can climb up high and sunny spots where they can sleep and relax. You'll want to get rid of any plants that are poisonous and make sure you have lots that are safe for your cat to sniff and explore.

Make sure it's just your cat getting through their cat flap

If you have a cat flap, you'll want to know that doesn't mean any cat in the neighbourhood can just stroll into your home. Your cat will also be very invested in this. As territorial creatures, cats don't welcome uninvited visitors! The easiest solution is to install a microchip operated cat flap.

Give your cat plenty of love (on their own terms of course!)

Cats, just like us humans will thrive if they feel loved and secure. So make sure you give them lots of affection - not hard when they're so adorable! Worried the bond between you and your cat isn't as strong as it could be? Check out How to get a cat to like you.

More troubleshooting tips

If you're doing all the things listed here, you're likely to have a very happy kitty on your hands, but cats, like humans do get stressed sometimes.

Is anxiety common in cats?

Anxiety is not uncommon in cats, although often that will be mild or moderate. Like so much else in life, it's best to tackle any problems early on.

Why is my cat so anxious all of a sudden?

If your cat has always been a pretty chilled individual and they suddenly seem stressed or anxious, it's likely this is in response to a recent change. This can be something obvious like a house move or a new pet or it can be something you wouldn't even think they'd notice

like you getting new carpet (they notice!).

How do you treat an anxious cat?

If your cat seems fearful or anxious, it’s natural for you to want to soothe and comfort them. This is absolutely fine as long as you don’t try to stop your cat ‘escaping’ to their hiding place if they need to. It’s always worth talking to your vet or a qualified pet behaviourist if you are unable to deal with your cat’s anxiety though.

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