



BRIARPOINTE VETERINARY CLINIC

47330 Ten Mile Road
Novi, MI 48374
(248) 449-7447

Ronald A. Studer, D.V.M., L.P.C. John S. Parker, D.V.M.

MOVING TO A NEW HOME

Moving into a new residence may be the most stressful event in anyone's life. It is important that you prepare your cat prior to moving into a new home to reduce their anxiety and minimize the problems that can result.

Why do cats try to return to their old home?

Cats are very territorial and may have problems accepting a new house as their home. If the old house is nearby, cats may return to their old haunts and try to take up residence with the new people living there. If the move is further away, cats may just wander off in an attempt to return home and get lost.

What can I do to help my outdoor cat adjust to our new home?

- Before leaving the old house, your cat should be fitted with an identification collar (elasticized or "breakaway") with your name and new address. This collar should be kept on at least until the cat is fully settled in their new home. Additionally, all pets should be permanently identified with a microchip.



- Your cat should be transported to the new house in a safe, well-secured container such as a cat carrier so there is no danger of escape.
- On arrival at the new house, the cat should be left in its carrier until one room has been unpacked and familiar objects and furniture placed. The cat can then be let out of the carrier, but kept confined to this room. Leave the carrier open, provide your cat with a litter box, and offer his or her favorite food in familiar food dishes.
- Once the moving personnel have gone and the house is quiet, check that all the doors and windows are closed then allow the cat to explore the new house.
- Your cat should be given lots of extra attention and petting during the adjustment period.
- For indoor/outdoor or outdoor cats only: Once your cat has become familiar with the new house, you can introduce him or her to the new garden or back yard. Start by accompanying

your cat outdoors, preferably on a leash. When the cat is thoroughly at home, he or she can be allowed out alone.

- Initially the cat should be let out alone only for short periods during the day. You should not feed your cat before allowing it outdoors, so that he or she will not wander too far and will readily respond to your call at feeding time.
- If possible, try to avoid having builders working in the house during the initial adjustment period. Cats do not like loud noises and it will inevitably make the adjustment more difficult.

How long will it be before I can safely let my cat outside alone?

This varies with the disposition of the cat and how much time has been spent on making the cat feel at home; some cats take only a few days to settle in while others may take three weeks or more. Outdoor cats with a wide experience of change tend to cope best, but even they should be kept in for at least a week to adjust to their new home.

My cat is very nervous. Are there any special precautions I should take?

It may be wise to board particularly nervous cats for a few days before and after the move, leaving them at the boarding facility until everything is unpacked and positioned in the new house.

My cat keeps attempting to return to our old house. What can I do?

This happens because the bond with the new home is not sufficiently established. Measures must be taken to establish the new home as the source of food and shelter, while denying these comforts at the old house. It may take weeks or months before the cat can safely be let out unattended.



- Keep the cat indoors at the new house for about a month. Use the guidelines given above to try increasing the bond with the new house. It may help to feed the cat small meals several times a day.
- When the cat is first let outdoors, he or she should be fasted for twelve hours so that he or she is really hungry. He or she should be left out for only a short time and then called in and fed. For the first two weeks your cat should only be let out once a day and be called in after no longer than thirty minutes and fed immediately.
- Warn the occupants of your old house and discourage them from feeding the cat, talking to the cat or otherwise encouraging him or her. In some cases, active deterrent action can be tried such as turning the cat out and spraying water.
- Other neighbors, even those who were previously friendly with the cat, should be asked to behave similarly.
- As a last resort, consider boarding the cat for a few weeks to minimize the cat's desire and instinct to return to its previous home.

My cat never goes outdoors so moving should be simple, shouldn't it?

Moving can be just as traumatic for an indoor cat because it involves a complete change of personal territory. Gradual introduction to one room at a time with lots of attention will help reduce the stress of changing residences.

Edited by John S. Parker, DVM
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