

ASK OUR VETERINARIANS

How can my indoor cat be stressed?

While it seems that most pets would have a stress free life, the fact is, we often don't recognize stress in our pets. Cats (and dogs) like routine and even subtle changes in their schedule or environment--for instance, a change in work schedule, rearranging the layout of your furniture, road construction outside your home or visitors around the holidays--can cause a pet to feel stressed because their surroundings have changed. These changes may cause your cat to hide, to become more aggressive, to urinate outside her litter pan, or even to become ill.

While you may not be able to avoid every change or stressor, there are some things that you can do to keep your cat calm and happy during times of change.

The Ohio State University has launched a program called the Indoor Pet Initiative, calling on pet owners and veterinarians to be more aware of things in the home that may be causing stress and how to keep your indoor pet happy and healthy.

One suggestion for cats is to create a safe haven or "refuge" in the home. This should be a quiet, comfortable area in the house where there is less traffic and where your cat can have access to all the essentials: food, water, a litter box, toys, and a scratching post. In other words, Kitty Heaven! You may also want to leave a radio or television softly playing in this area to block sounds that may be unsettling to your cat.

The refuge is meant to be a relaxing, safe area where your cat can go when he or she needs some space or quiet time. If your cat is in his refuge, (s)he should not be bothered by family members or other pets. Access to the refuge should be available at all times.

This seems like a simple thing to do to keep your feline friends happy, but it can make a world of difference to your cat to have a small place in the house to call his or her own. To learn more tips about living with indoor pets, visit <http://indoorpet.osu.edu/>.

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