

When Two is Better Than One

While we may pride ourselves on how we pamper our pets with the best of everything, we may be denying them what they need most--the companionship of one of their own species. Most feline behaviorists agree that cats generally lead healthier, happier lives if there is another feline in the household. Even if the cats never become bosom buddies, just sharing the house with another living creature while you are away helps to break the monotony and loneliness. Of course, if they become playmates, there is the added benefit of exercise and entertainment that is especially needed by kittens and young adult cats. Many cases of playful aggression directed toward the owner as well as various forms of household destruction, can be prevented if the cat's energies are focused on a playmate. Young males (3-24 months) have an especially strong need for a "buddy". While owners of rambunctious young males often hesitate to take on another cat, those who take that "leap of faith" and get another young male are generally delighted to see how much the "boys" enjoy each other.

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Two Cats Are Better Than One

By Steve Duno

Although cats in the wild are by nature solitary, most domestic felines can readily appreciate and accept the company of other cats. This is especially true if two littermates are raised together from kitten hood. Though not necessary, this companionship can make your job as an owner all the more easy.

Some cats can become bored and listless if left alone all day. Though not as socially needy as dogs, cats (especially gregarious breeds such as the Siamese or Abyssinian) can react adversely to isolation, sometimes becoming destructive, noisy, or very messy. Although the addition of toys, feline furniture, randomly placed treats, or the sounds of a radio or television can often minimize this, a few cats just can't get make it alone.

A perfectly good way of keeping a cat happy while you are gone is to have another feline friend around, preferably right from the start. They will play together, chase each other, or even sleep together in a ball. Both will burn pent-up energy and stimulate their minds while waiting for you to come home.

If at all possible, try to acquire two cats of the same age, right from the start, to insure happy times. Siblings are the best bet, but any two kittens of the same age should do nicely. Cats of opposite gender will generally have fewer incidents of territorial or food aggression, but same-sex cats will usually learn to work out their pecking order without much fanfare.

With two cats in the home, you should use two litter boxes, two food dishes, and two water dishes. Doing so will minimize the chances of food aggression or house-soiling. Also, be sure to add a few more toys and into the mix, to reduce the chance of competitive hostilities. Always pay attention to both, and try not to play favorites!

Two cats are nearly as easy to care for as one. Additional food costs will be minimal, as will be the price of the new litter box, extra litter, and dishes. Beyond that, one extra visit to the veterinarian is the only other fee you will pay for having two happy, socially active felines in the home.

For more information on this subject, contact your veterinarian. 1-800-PetMeds

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There are benefits to having two cats, but they apply only when the two cats are well matched and have enough physical space to live together comfortably. One benefit is that the two cats provide each other with exercise, social interaction, and other forms of mental stimulation. Cats housed together have more opportunity to “be cats” by socializing and playing with each other, and this means they are less likely to be destructive or engage in other problematic behavior. For example, some single cats annoy their owners by trying to wake them during the night for play. Two cats might still wake the owner by tearing around the home but at least, the owner isn’t getting up out of bed to entertain the cat. Another benefit of two cats is that they are sometimes cleaner than a cat living by itself. Cats will groom each other’s ears and coat, often getting at places the cat can’t reach on its own!

The positive impact of having multiple cats can be negated by “cohabitation anxiety” if the cats do not get along. Adult cats with a history of living alone are better off remaining solitary unless you can provide so much space that the cats essentially live alone in the same home. It’s also important to be aware that cats can take a LONG time to learn to like each other. Dogs usually decide to be friends, or not, within a few hours or days. Cats, on the other hand, can take as long as a year to stop squabbling and start hanging out together.

Individual cats differ in activity level and sociability, primarily because of age differences and previous experience and exposure to other cats. These differences must be considered when making a match. Kittens, adolescents, and young adults can satisfy each other’s need to play by engaging in stalk-chase and wrestling games. Other suitable matches include pairing a kitten with an experienced adult female, so the female can take on a “motherly” role, or pairing a “bratty” adolescent with an older, more experienced cat. In some cases, a calm mature adult with a history of maternal or social behavior can tolerate the inappropriate behavior of a younger cat with limited social skills, and in the process “teach” more socially acceptable behavior.

Space is an absolute necessity for multiple cat homes. The Waltham Centre for Pet Nutrition found that cats housed in groups are less likely to exhibit aggressive or anxious behavior when each cat has at least 1 m² of floor space and 2 m of vertical space, such as window sills and shelving. Providing access to an outdoor enclosure also significantly increases living space, except during the colder months when cats have little desire to be outside. Indoor cats do best with multiple sites for resting and hiding, so each cat can control how much it interacts with others. Cats need to have spots for hiding so they can be alone and undisturbed. Multiple litterboxes are also advisable so the cats can feel safe while eliminating. The number of litter boxes should equal the number of cats you have, plus one. So, for example, if you have three cats, you need four boxes. And, of course, provide plenty of scratching posts and toys to keep everyone happy. Food and water can be placed in a common area, as cats seem to enjoy congregating to eat. However, if you have a particularly timid cat, you may need to provide extra rations in a secluded area.

Realize that multiple cats are not likely to be best buddies immediately. There are no guarantees and it’s always best to be super-cautious when introducing cats to each other. Refer to the [ASPCA’s guidelines for introducing cats](#). If you are adopting a cat that has already lived in a group at the shelter, consider adopting one of his/her friends. Introducing two friends to a new home can ease the transition, and you’ll be much more likely to have a successful merger.