

Brain & Cognitive Disorders

Tips for a Pet-Friendly Relocation



Whether a new home is across town or across the country, relocating is often stressful for pets. Their current home is more than their home; it is their territory. Cats, especially, are very sensitive and prefer to be in a familiar environment. Dogs tend to adjust more easily than cats. However, moving to a new home can be an anxious time for dogs as well. If the time comes for you to relocate to a new home, there are ways you can help to reduce your pet's stress and anxiety.

Before the Relocation: Preparing Your Pet

1. Acclimate your cat to a carrier and travel.

Regardless of the distance you are traveling, your cat will be safer in a pet carrier. If your cat has never been in a carrier, introduce the idea slowly. Start by putting a blanket and cat treats inside and leaving the door open. Gradually increase the time inside the carrier and eventually shut the door.

Once your cat is comfortable in the carrier, the next step is familiarizing your cat with car travel. Start with short 10-minute rides, then longer 20-minute rides. This helps your cat gradually become more accustomed to the sights and sounds associated with car travel. Be sure to leave the cat carrier out in the house during this time so your cat remains comfortable with it.

2. Familiarize your dog with the new neighborhood if possible.

For dogs, consider taking your dog to your new neighborhood for walks. Walk by your new house and let your dog become acquainted with the scents of the neighborhood.

3. While you are packing, try not to isolate your pet.

Include your pet while you pack boxes, allowing them to investigate the activity. Isolating your pet while the rest of the family packs and prepares could stress your pet and lead to anxious behaviors.

Relocation Day: Keeping Your Pet Safe

1. Keep your cat in the carrier.

This will ensure your cat does not escape out an open door and remains safe.

2. Ensure your dog is away from the excitement.

Consider assigning a responsible family member to be the designated dog sitter in a quiet room. Or have your dog spend the day elsewhere, which may be a less stressful option.

Welcoming Your Cat to Your New Home

1. Conduct a safety review.

Before letting your cat out of the carrier in your new home, inspect the home from your cat's point of view—inside and out. Remove any dangling cords from drapes or blinds to help keep your pet safe. Keep doors and windows closed and block access to any holes or crawl spaces where your cat would be out of your reach.

2. Maintain your cat's routine.

Maintain your cat's established schedule for meals and playtime to help your cat acclimate to the new home.

3. Choose a special room that will be your cat's private refuge.

Place your cat's food and water bowls, bed, scratching post, and litter box—familiar items from your previous home—in the room. Consider including an item with your scent, such as an item of clothing. Once your cat is comfortable there, your cat can begin to explore the rest of the house. (Be sure to place a second litter box in the location where you plan to keep one permanently.)

Welcoming Your Dog to Your New Home

1. Encourage your dog to explore.

Let your dog explore the new home inside and outside. Walk your dog on a leash during this initial introduction to help your dog feel safe and secure. The sooner your dog becomes familiar with the new environment, the sooner your dog will feel at home.

2. Maintain your dog's routine.

Following your established routine can help your dog adjust. Take walks at your usual time and maintain the same schedule for meals, treats, playtime, and bedtime as you had at your previous home.

Settling in Your New Home

1. If possible, spend a few days at home with your pet after arriving at your new home and before returning to work.

During this period, begin to stay away from home for short periods of time to help your pet adjust to being alone in the new home. Do not leave your dog unattended outside. Dogs may escape from yards in an attempt to return to their familiar previous home.

2. Talk to your veterinarian.

If your pet is having trouble adjusting to your new home, your veterinarian may recommend a supplement that can support calm behavior, such as a probiotic containing the proprietary strain *Bifidobacterium longum* NCC3001 (BL999), alpha-casozepine (derived from milk), or L-theanine (from tea), in dogs. A Purina study showed that anxious dogs supplemented with the strain of *Bifidobacterium longum* showed a reduction in anxious behaviors. Another Purina study showed the proprietary strain of *Bifidobacterium longum* reduced stress and associated behavior, e.g., pacing, in cats. Alpha-casozepine or L-tryptophan may also help reduce anxiety in cats. If your pet's signs are severe, your veterinarian may recommend a behavior specialist and/or medications.

While moving can be a stressful experience, following these tips can help your pet adjust to your new home together.

The Purina Institute aims to help put nutrition at the forefront of pet health discussions by providing user-friendly, science-based information that helps pets live longer, healthier lives.