

Common Errors to Avoid When Adopting a Cat

Many potential cat owners face challenges they never anticipated. Follow these essential tips to avoid the common errors that can complicate the adoption process and ensure your new feline family member settles in happily and healthily.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Cats make wonderful animal companions because they're relatively easy to care for, and retain just enough traits of their wild cousins to make them fascinating to have around
- Adopting a cat is a significant commitment of time, energy, and resources for the life of the animal, so it's a decision that must be given careful thought
- Things you don't want to do when adding a cat to the family include making a hasty decision, overlooking the needs of your current cat if you have one, and rushing introductions between the new cat and existing pets

If you're considering adopting a new — or another — kitty from your local shelter or rescue, it's important to keep in mind that it will be one of the most significant commitments you'll make in your lifetime. Accepting responsibility for caring for a living creature who will be totally dependent on you isn't something to take lightly.

"Bringing home a new family member is an exciting time, but it also takes careful preparation," writes veterinarian Dr. Jeannine Berger in PetMD.¹

The following are some common mistakes potential cat guardians make when adopting a kitty, and what they should do instead.

10 Things NOT to Do When Adopting a Feline Family Member

1. **Don't make a hasty decision** — Sadly, many pets are acquired on a whim, without thought or preparation. Your heart may be in the right place, but unless you're prepared to invest the time, effort and money necessary to properly care for a cat for her lifetime, which can be 20 years or longer, things can go south in a hurry.

In those cases, and there are far too many of them, the kitty is the inevitable loser. Shelters are full of pets that were the result of an impulse purchase or adoption. Berger suggests asking yourself the following questions:

- Why do I want to adopt a cat, and why now?
- Is adopting a cat from a shelter or purchasing a kitten from a breeder the best decision for me?
- What is my lifestyle like, and how will a cat fit into it?
- Is there a certain cat breed or age that would be a better fit for me?

- Am I able to take on the financial responsibility of caring for a cat?
- How will my current animals adapt to a new cat in the home?
- If I go on vacation, do I have someone to care for a cat while I'm away?

Most importantly, be honest with yourself. Don't be afraid to leave a shelter or rescue without a cat if you don't find the right fit. Your ideal cat is out there — it might just take patience to find them.

2. **Don't think only of today** — What changes do you expect in your life in the next 5, 10 or 15 years? While we can't predict the future, most of us have a vision for our lives that extends years down the road.

These days, it's not unusual for a well-cared-for cat to live into her late teens or early 20s, so adoption means taking on a multi-year commitment. It's important to be reasonably sure your lifestyle will be as pet-friendly in the future as it is today.

3. **Don't overlook the needs of your current cat if you have one** — It's crucially important to plan ahead if you already have a kitty and want to add another to the household. Some cats with no history together can learn to get along or at least tolerate each other over time, but there are situations in which it's just too dangerous or stressful to keep two poorly matched animals under the same roof.

Unfortunately, bringing a new cat into a home with an existing cat is often one of those situations. Give some thought to how your current cat might react to a new cat. If in the past he's shown aggression or fear around other kitties, you could be setting the stage for a problem.

It's a good idea to try to match the temperament and energy level of a new cat with that of your existing cat to improve the chances the two will get along. If things don't go well initially, I encourage you to consult with an **animal behavior specialist** before throwing in the towel on adopting a second cat.

Often, it just takes some time and a few helpful tips to put an existing pet and a new one on the road to a harmonious relationship.

4. **Don't rule out adopting an adult cat** — Kittens are adorable, but they're also a lot more work than an adult cat. In addition, adult and senior cats are often overlooked at shelters in favor of kittens, but mature kitties have just as much love to give. And another benefit of adopting an adult cat is their personality is already known, they tend to be more settled, and can fit into your family's daily routine more quickly than a kitten.
5. **Don't overlook black cats looking for homes** — Sadly, black pets are among the most overlooked in shelters. Hopefully, you don't still (or never did) believe the silly myth that black cats bring bad luck, because it's utter nonsense! Another reason it can be hard to find homes for black kitties is because their faces don't appear as expressive as those of lighter-colored cats, but I can assure you that's entirely attributable to their dark coloring and not their personalities!

If you've got your eye on a black cat, you might ask the shelter staff if they offer discounts on adoption fees for black pets. Many shelters do, because they're aware of the difficulties involved in placing these animals.

6. **Don't rule out adopting two kittens at the same time** — If you decide you're in a position to take on a kitten, consider bringing home two. When adopted as a pair as babes, your kittens will enjoy growing up together and have a constant playmate to keep them company.
7. **Don't put off purchasing supplies** — Once you've decided it's the right time to add a cat to your family, it's important to get prepared before he or she comes home. It's always better to prepare a **safe space filled**

with must-have supplies before you bring your cat home vs. after. Berger suggests having the following items on hand:

- Resting places
 - Climbing areas
 - Hiding spots
 - Food and water (and food and water bowls)
 - Litter boxes
 - Enrichment toys
 - Feliway® classic pheromone diffuser
8. **Don't forget to cat-proof your home** — Cats are curious and physically flexible creatures, which means they can easily get into things they shouldn't. Cat-proof your home beforehand by taking steps to remove potential toxins, small objects that could be swallowed, and electrical cords that could be chewed on. Also, secure heavy objects that could fall onto your kitty.
 9. **Don't rush introductions** — As Berger explains, it can take days to weeks for a cat to settle into a new environment, so when you bring your adopted kitty home, take her to the safe space you set up and allow her to acclimate to your home at her own pace. Don't force introductions to any other pets in your home and give everyone ample time and space to adjust and get acquainted.
 10. **Don't skip the all-important first wellness exam** — Chances are the shelter or rescue where you adopt your cat will release him only after all required medical checks and procedures have been accomplished (e.g., spay/neuter, vaccination, deworming, etc.). Your job will be to establish your new kitty as a patient at a local veterinary clinic as soon as possible, ideally within the first 7 to 10 days after adoption.

Sources and References

¹ [PetMD, December 19, 2023](#)
