

What is decompression and how can I help my new cat 🐱 through it?

LARGE PRINT/FOR DOWNLOAD with LIVE LINKS

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Lora's Cats
"We are NOT unlucky!"
Part of Lora's Luck Dog Rescue, Foster and Adoption Service

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Saving death row and abandoned black cats

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THE FIRST THREE MONTHS

The most important phase that cats go through when getting out of the shelter and when first in their foster or adoptive home is the "Decompression Phase."



Any change in a cat's environment or routine will cause some level of stress and it's our job as their guardian to be patient and guide them through this time; however long it takes. Most cats do not like change and will take time to connect to you and your home. We recommend looking at three months minimum before you can see they have truly started to settle in.

Decompression is exactly that- **unwinding or unfolding** after a period of high stimulus (travelling to a new place.) And some cats do it faster than others so there are no hard and fast rules. Imagine a squeaky toy. Now stand on it.

Then quickly take your foot off. See how long, and how noisily, it goes back to 'normal'. Multiply that by at least one hundred for a living creature!

Your foster will have helped your new cat through a lot of this,

but as all cats get back into their 'normal shape' at different rates, s/he could be anywhere on that progress when he comes to you.

“Settling Your Cat Into the New Home

Once you've arrived, keep your kitty in their safe carrier as you cat-proof the new home. Close all windows and doors, and tuck away any electrical cords or plugs where your cat might get stuck.

Introduce one room first. When the room is secure, let your cat out of the carrier to explore. It's safest to keep your kitty in one designated room while there's a lot of activity in the new home.

Make sure there's a litter box, food, and water- in separate bowls- in this designated room. Set aside time to quietly spend time with your cat in their temporary room to help them feel comfortable in the new house.

If your cat seems nervous, you may choose to keep your cat in one room for a few days to give them ample time to acclimate to the new space. We will need you to do this for the 48 hour quarantine period anyway as a legal requirement.

Things to Look Out For:

Runaway cats.

When moving to a new area, it is common for cats to attempt to return to their old stomping grounds. It's safest to keep your cat indoors all the time. Even if you plan to let the cat go outside eventually, keep them indoors until you are sure they have bonded with the new space. It is best to keep your cat indoors for a minimum of two weeks. You can encourage positive associations with your new home by feeding your cat more often with small meals and incorporating more treats and play into your cat's day.

When you do let your cat outside, make it short at first, and keep an eye on them. Call the cat in after 10 minutes to start, and work your way up to longer times outside.

Neighbourhood cats.

If you do start letting your cat wander the neighbourhood,

stay vigilant and listen for the sounds of a catfight. Keep a close eye on your cat until both of you are familiar with any other cats in the area.

Stressful events. Even after you and your cat have settled, stressors like thunderstorms or fireworks can unsettle your cat during the early days in your new home. Take extra precautions to keep your cat indoors, safe, and secure in their new home.” Amy Flowers, DVM. June 28, 2021



All cats need structure for them to feel safe. They thrive on predictable routines. The greatest form of affection we can show our new cat is to fulfil their needs:

- to eat,
- to have clean water,
- to go the toilet in an obviously positioned

litter tray,

- need to roam in the house
- to have a safe cozy/soft/warm area (their den) to rest in.

This can be a basket, igloo, blanket fort, pile of cushions or toys... whatever your cat feels safe with. NOTE **we at Lora's Luck DO NOT CAGE or crate**, and use soft baskets with high sides; wet pads for 'accidents'; and blankets, but a cat carrier will be needed for a 'starting den' for the cat of course, and to take them to the vets, They must not be locked in it all day and/or all night; or outside all the time unsupervised. Leave the gate open as much as possible and be close by as much as possible after quarantine.

Of course you can pet your new cat; you can give her/him treats and a toy to play/cuddle with. BUT it's important to keep all of these things to a minimum for at least the first few days. Lora's Luck when they foster get this process started in the first (up to) three months so it is easier as a new adopter to continue the same comforting routine so the transition from foster cat to forever cat is as smooth as possible.

However, any/all of the following can be used to get your cat used to your forever home. Sometimes the best thing is just to leave them to it to decompress as, unlike dogs, most cats will **decompress 100% on their own terms!**

They will choose HOW, WHEN and WHERE they feel safe.

'Lava' cats: They may hide behind the TV or something before you can get them to their safe room. So keep them in the

carrier till they are in the chosen safe room. If they do get out and camp out under something ‘unsuitable’ like a chair or bed, just leave the carrier, food and water and litter tray where they land. *DON’T reach under to try and get them out.*



‘Kettle’ cats: They may want to ‘talk’ to you, cling to your legs (watch they don’t trip you!) or jump on you for comfort, or decide behind your head is the best place once quarantine is over. Go with it. Be a human cushion! But don’t overdo the

fuss. Take the time to sneakily check things by eye like eyes ears, teeth and claws.



We have a [blog](#) on what on earth the terms 'lava' or 'kettle' mean. Reading it will help, especially if you have resident dogs we and you will also need to consider!

Check with your individual foster which one(s) which things they are used to as they tend to use very neutral methods.

Cats will need to be collected from the bus or a foster with a cat

carrier.

Cats will have to have a collar and ID tag. (We do custom ones for you for free but you can also buy their our [shop](#) as well as [collar charms](#) that are less obvious/smaller than a bell and lightweight for cats and dogs!

- When your cat first arrives, see if they are hungry or thirsty. This is unlikely if they have come from our foster.
- Once you have taken the cat to the **safe room**, see if s/he wants a drink (have a water bowl by the carrier) and BACK AWAY slowly. Leave the room if they appear distressed. The safe space should be in an area of the house that is neither too isolated (on another floor to where you are) nor in the middle of everything. You want your new cat to have a couple of days of processing quiet before they start to observe you and your family routine without feeling stressed and overwhelmed.
- Try **not to pick the cat up** too much at first, and not at all unless completely necessary during the 48 hour quarantine period. Cats will tell you when they're ready to engage but they are much smaller than you and too much handling at first can cause fear aggression as they feel out of control of their environment <https://www.thesprucepets.com/sooth-fear-aggression-553925>
- **hand feed** him her/his meal or try **gentle strokes** as they decompress more and come to you for attention, perhaps even a gentle **groom** (great bonding/engagement exercise) with **24/7 access to a litter tray**. If s/he wants to sleep right away, let her/him as sleep is the best way to process, but if they want to engage right away just be neutral and let them climb on you without trying to fuss too much. The more you repeat these (in whatever order best works), the sooner s/he will have a comforting routine and the faster the cat under all that fear and stress will come out and shine!

TOP TIPS

(yes, it's hard but you won't regret it!)

DON'T try any of this too soon (although your cat may make up their own rules for you to follow!) 🐱

1. no rough play- you will get scratched or bitten!
2. being on the couch
3. beds,(as above)
4. laps,(as above)
5. kissyface,(as above)
6. free roam through the entire house just the rooms you want him to go in, (as above)
7. interactions with any other pets too soon, (usually it works itself out, but that's a pet by pet basis)
8. visits from your friends and family, or all crowd into the room at once, staring at him
9. trips in the car(unless it's to the vet of course).
10. DO NOT STARE AT YOUR CAT!
11. do not use a water spray to 'discipline' cats, they usually (but not always) loathe water
12. don't approach with your hands above your waist, always palm down and by your knee.

DO

1. have **toys** s/he likes in her/his space for them to cuddle with. They will be missing their siblings.
2. **fuss** her/him once quarantine is over, if s/he comes to you for some. Let them smell your fingers and fuss under the chin gently when you fuss and keep your hand under her/his jaw slowly moving. Fuss the ears and across the head slowly, make sure s/he can see your hands. (Don't try body or paws.)
3. **Listen to her/his 'noises'**. S/he may quickly 'cry' or go to the door (but not always the 'right' door) to go to the toilet/ litter tray, or if they think it's tea time. If s/he knows you know his signal, s/he'll use it and be less likely to wee in the house.

4. Have small **treats** on standby, see if you can encourage her/him to not stay in her/his safe space all the time as the hours/days go on. This will also help with her/his bonding.
5. Get the **collar** on asap, but if they are too distressed leave it, but do not let them out of their safe room.
6. If s/he makes signs of wanting to play, (using a paw, coming to you etc) use soft encouraging words and play back.

The goal for these first few days to a month is to help your cat observe the structure/rules/boundaries of your home. **DO NOT let them out at all for this first month minimum and preferably not for at least three months.**

- **If s/he comes out, engage.** This can become more robust as you get used to how he (and you!) like to play or fuss. Avoid the belly even if they present it till you know your new cat very well.
- The first few days and weeks for any new cats should be very simple. **Sleep, quiet space** with cat **carrier** in and something that **smells of you, food and water**, activity and cuddle **toys**, maybe even get some of our [catnip toys](#) we sell in our shop!
- **And do not let them out of the house!**



Imagine you just started a new job. You walk through the huge entrance to the building and you're standing in the lobby trying to figure out which way to go.

You don't know where your office is. You don't know where the staff room is. You don't know where the loo is. And you don't know any of your co-workers. You're pretending not to care and trying to brave it out but you have no clue what's going on and this place looks and smells nothing like where you last worked.

This is not going well and you're already starting to feel worried and anxious.

Now imagine that same new job but as you walk into the building, a co-worker walks up to you and calmly says "Hi, welcome to XYZ Enterprise, follow me and I will show you around." They give you the tour, they keep the noise to a minimum, they give you a welcome packet and they show you to your office. They tell you you can be in there as long as you need to get settled and the drinks and snacks are in the cupboard, with the loo just down the hall.

How much more relaxed and comfortable would you be in the

second scenario?

Your co-worker made you feel comfortable by guiding you and giving you information. Not by hugging or showering you with affection. Or giving you too much to take on too fast.

That's exactly the relaxed comfortable feeling you need to create for your new cat. Cats want to please themselves, but they generally do bond and want to bond, sometimes very deeply, with humans and will get stressed if they can't work out who you are and what the house routine is! You may get your bearings in hours and feel right at home. It may take a day or two, or even a week or two, as you keep forgetting where the toilets are. Or what that weird noise is. Or who that new person is...

For more on what might spook cats check this out but this is a good **list of usual no-no's** when your cat arrives and in general:

Water, as has been said

strong smells

feeling restrained/held too tight

strangers

loud noises

changes in routine

cucumbers and other long vegetables (could be an old instinct, their skins and length could remind them of predators like snakes)

balloons

dogs that are not used to cats (if this is a first time intro, get professional help! We do offer full advice on this of course but only in the capacity of a rescue and based on our knowledge of our cats here with us. Just

because the cats live ok with dogs where they are it doesn't mean you don't need to prepare your resident dog(s) or other cat(s) for the new arrival.)
being stared at

If it takes your cat longer; it could be they're worried about getting stuff wrong, or cannot discharge the stress they felt during travelling. They can't ask for help as they can't speak English. So they can show you their upset using their bodies- **hissing and spitting, running away, scenting, or protest toileting** not in the litter box. This is your new cat. For more guidance on this try [this useful link](#).

During decompression, they're confused, and likely to be **clingy (kettle) or irritable (lava)** about all this all the time. And can easily swap between both behaviours if stressed. So give her/him time but encourage his/her overtures, and it should all be fine! S/he will hopefully know some words (ask your foster which one(s)!) that you can use right away, and add your own for your circumstances.

New English words like 'dinner time' or even 'puss puss' need to be clear and consistent, and can be rewarded with treats (but not every time) and fuss.

The best of luck with your new cat!

For how to adopt a cat or kitten, please read our [Lora's Cats FAQs](#).

And to have an insight into **why we rescue the black ones**, please read [this beautiful cartoon](#) by @jennyjinya. The first panel of it is below, with full credits given to Jenny, her work is heartbreaking yet so simple.





EQUITY BY DESIGN- inclusive information by default.

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