

Getting Your Cat Back Home! (a.k.a Reintegration)

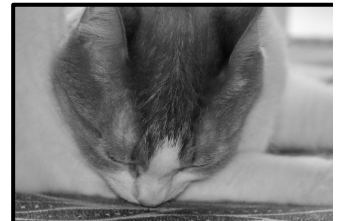
You've conditioned your cat to enjoy her carrier. You've familiarized her with the car. She tolerates the veterinary visit, even demonstrating affection for one or more staff members. However, when you get home, her feline roommate shuns her or, even worse, acts aggressively. What's going on?



Recall that cats identify each other through communal scents and are highly dependent on their exceptional sense of smell. They develop this unique scent by cohabitating in the same environment, by grooming each other, and by sleeping in close contact with each other. This common smell communicates that your cat is a familiar and safe individual to your other felines.

Visits outside the common environment, even brief


ones, change the communal scent profile. Petting by front office and technician staff, handling by the doctor for the physical exam, products that may have been applied to your companion (e.g. isopropyl alcohol for blood draws), and environmental disinfectants all leave their own smells that are distinctively different from the familiar shared scent. Furthermore the “stay home” cat may associate one or more veterinary smells with his own prior negative experience.



So, when your absent kitty returns home after a veterinary visit the other housecats may no longer perceive him as a friend and may react indifferently or hostilely. In many ways, it's as if a stranger cat has intruded upon the home. Furthermore, persistent avoidance or aggression behaviors prevent the cats from getting close enough to intermingle and restore the communal scent.

How can we try to prevent or mitigate this non-recognition aggression?

- 🐾 Minimize stress by using a veterinary practice which incorporates fear-free and cat-friendly approaches.
- 🐾 Try to schedule routine visits for multiple cats at the same time- this causes each cat to return home with a similar scent profile.
- 🐾 When possible allow the visiting cat, on returning home, to spend several hours by itself. This allows a good opportunity to groom off any offensive odors as well as to relax and be less defensive.
- 🐾 Redistribute the common scent profile. Use unwashed bedding or “freshen up” a new towel by rubbing it over those cats who stayed home, especially on the cheeks, and then rubbing on the cat returning home.
- 🐾 Make sure your cat has fully recovered from sedation or anesthesia before reintroduction- strange behaviors (e.g. staggering, wooziness etc.) may be confusing to the other household cats.
- 🐾 Gradually reintegrate the cats. Separating them by a screen or baby gate allows them to see and smell each other without the fear of physical conflict.

 Reward cats for getting along while reintegrating- give plenty of treats and physical contact (which, again, will help redistribute common scents).

Easy, anxiety-free returns home represent the last component in a successful, cat-friendly visit to the veterinarians. Please ask a staff member if you have any additional questions or concerns about this important topic.

The doctors and staff of Civic Feline Clinic