



Switching Up Your Cat's Routine: Ease Stress For Your Cat

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After everything we endured in 2020, life slowly appears to be returning to normal. For many cat owners, that means spending more time outside the home, especially at work. Gone are the days of typing with one hand and scratching a furry chin with the other. And while working on-site may ease some of your stress, the change in routine can ramp it up for your feline friend.

Though your cat doesn't have to worry about paying bills or getting to meetings on time, they're still sensitive to changes that affect their life and their perception of "normal." To complicate matters, cats generally hide their stress, like they would any injury or illness, as a matter of survival — they don't want to reveal weakness to potential predators or foes.

So as you look ahead to your new schedule, check out some ways to ease your cat into the updated routine, and make sure to watch for any unexplained changes in behavior that could indicate they're feeling stressed.

How to help your cat adjust to a new routine

Take kitten steps

If you're lucky enough to have gotten the word about returning to your workplace or office well ahead of time, this gives you a great opportunity to help your cat gradually adjust to the new schedule. If you also have the option to continue working from home a few days a week, the added flexibility will aid your efforts.

First, minimize any other major changes in your cat's life while you both go through this phase. For example, don't rearrange all the furniture. Don't drastically alter the scents in your home, such as by having the carpets and rugs cleaned, switching laundry products or testing out a different litter brand. And by all means, don't introduce a new pet to keep your cat company.



Start mimicking your soon-to-be workdays

Each day, leave the house to run errands or take a walk, and slowly increase the time you're gone. Try giving your cat [a few treats](#) as you leave so they associate a positive feeling with your departure. To keep them entertained longer, leave them a food puzzle or food-dispensing toy.

Do you wear certain clothes for work or carry specific items?

Start adding them to your random daily trips. Your cat is highly intelligent and will learn

your daily routine, especially the part where you come home each time.

If certain set times in your cat's routine shifted during 2020 — like their meals, playtime, litter pan cleaning or your own sleep hours — start easing them back so the change isn't as abrupt when you return to work. Overall, resist engaging with your cat too much during your soon-to-be workday hours.

Make your human-free home cat comfy

Think about what a given workday has been like at home. If you always had music or the television going, try leaving it on at first to help create the “white noise” your cat is used to. If you often had the blinds or curtains open on certain windows — especially ones your cat can see through or that let in good napping sunlight — set them the same way before you go. Try to replicate the everyday experience your cat has come to know.

In case your cat has a bout of separation anxiety when you're out of the house, give them a place they can retreat to and feel safe until you come home. It could be a shadowy corner under a desk or a simple cardboard box — wherever your cat feels the most comfortable.

What if you have to go back right now?

This isn't the scenario you want, but some people have to return to work more immediately. This means a sudden jolt to your cat's routine, but it doesn't mean your cat is doomed to anxiety medication for the rest of their life. Cats have amazing resiliency and can adjust over time.

If you do have to fast-track your new schedule, spend as much extra time as you can sharing bonding moments with your cat. Mealtime is a great opportunity to reinforce positive associations, particularly when you're indulging them with [SHEBA® PERFECT PORTIONS™ premium cat food](#).



8 signs your cat could be stressed

Despite your preparation and planning, your cat may still have difficulty adjusting to the new routine. If they start showing signs of stress, consult your vet to discuss possible solutions.

1. Peeing outside the box

If your cat starts urinating outside the litter box just as your routine changes, stress is a likely suspect. However, it might also be due to a coinciding medical issue — this can be

serious, so see your veterinarian right away.

2. Hide and don't seek

For many cats, being aloof and independent is a perk of the job. But if your cat is now hiding from you and evading contact, it's a stress response. As long as their hiding spaces are safe, let your cat be alone, don't make a big fuss and allow them to interact with you on their own terms.

3. Hair scare

Cats are master groomers and wouldn't dare be caught with a tuft out of place. But a truly stressed cat can lick almost manically, creating bald spots in an otherwise lustrous coat and leaving skin red and sore. If extra attention and time to adjust to the new routine doesn't improve the behavior, a vet visit is in order.

4. Scratch, scratch, scratch ...

Compulsive scratching that erupts as your cat's routine shifts is likely caused by stress (rather than parasites, allergies, dry skin, etc.). Help your cat feel safe and comfortable, and provide extra stimulation without overwhelming them.



5. Chatty cat

Cats vary in how vocal they are — some are talkers and some aren't. If your cat is suddenly chattier than usual, consider that stress could be scripting it, especially if the soliloquies are long, loud and/or panicked.

6. Meal timeout

If the usual cuisine isn't cutting it with your cat, don't take it personally — or lightly. Even if new-schedule stress is causing the loss of appetite, going without food for even a few days can have life-threatening consequences. See your vet immediately.

7. Snooze alarm

Every cat averages a different number of sleep hours per day. If your feline friend suddenly starts sleeping more than usual or seems lethargic, stress may be a factor. Once your cat gets used to the new routine and knows that you'll always come back, hopefully this pattern will improve.

8. Aggression session

Stress or sickness can turn your mild-mannered cat into a menace. They might direct aggressive behavior toward pets, other animals and people — even you. It's best to consult your veterinarian or a veterinary behaviorist right away.

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