



How to help your pet adjust to change

Adjusting to change can be challenging for the best of us, even when these changes are positive. As humans, we often have the advantage of being prepared and having many resources to support us. Our pets, on the other hand, need to rely on us to help them adapt to change. This is why it's important to do some planning and to identify when our furry friends are struggling to cope so we can seek professional help as needed.

It's quite common to hear from owners that their dog or cat is behaving differently after some change in their lives. Although our pets can't always tell us how they're feeling in the same way as humans, many behaviours can be signs of stress. Learning to identify the possible signs of stress will help you notice when your pet may be struggling to cope in a situation. Without being addressed, stress can become

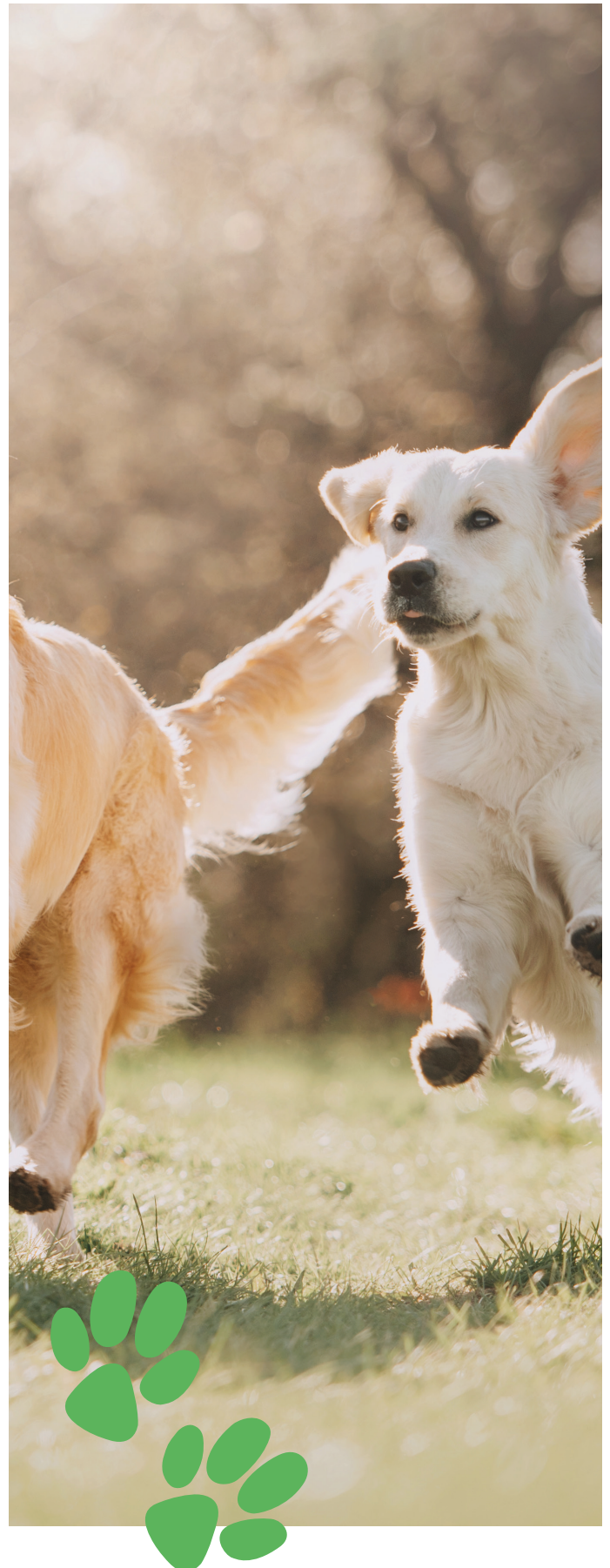
chronic, affecting your pet's health and happiness. Your veterinarian can help with chronic conditions caused by stress, so seek their advice if your pet shows any changes in:

- Appetite
- Eating or drinking
- Toileting
- Grooming
- Activity levels
- Personality

Some of the biggest changes to the lives of our companion animals are changes to their household or environment. The following checklist provides tips for helping your pet adjust to new situations:

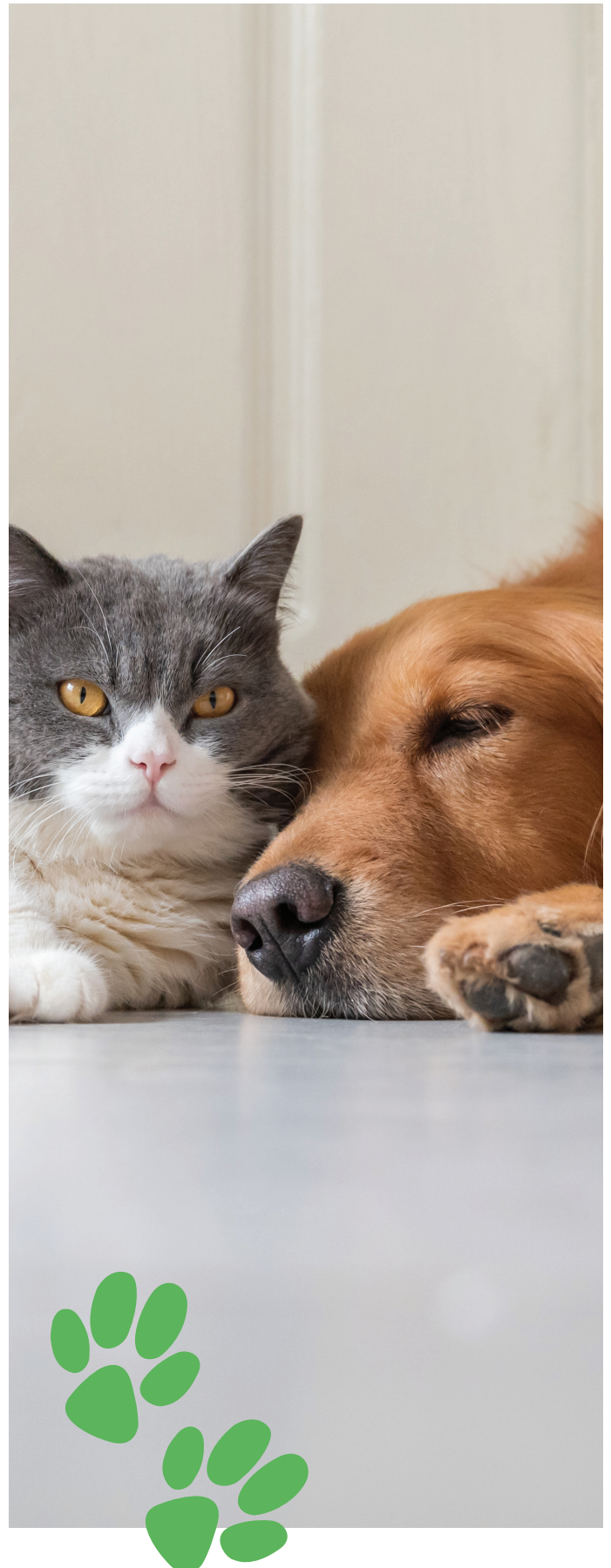
Introducing your existing dog to a new dog

- ☐ Ideally, you should try to introduce your existing pet to any potential new dog before making the final decision to bring the newbie home. RSPCA encourages this, such as by providing the opportunity for you to bring your dog into a shelter for a meet and greet as a way of [introducing new dogs to others](#).
- ☐ When introducing a new dog to your existing dog, start by allowing them to explore the house while your other dog is being taken for a walk, so he or she can become familiar with their new home and also with the [scent of your existing dog](#).
- ☐ Set up their first meeting on neutral territory outside the home; at a nearby park or somewhere that neither dog feels the need to protect.
- ☐ Provide both dogs with treats to reward positive behaviours such as being curious, playful and relaxed when together and getting along.
- ☐ Hide away treats, toys and other prized possessions at home to reduce competition.
- ☐ Allow your dogs to explore the house and yard together under close supervision.
- ☐ Distract them both if you see any signs of aggression.
- ☐ Give your new dog a separate sleeping area.
- ☐ Feed the dogs apart until you've established there are no problems such as food guarding.
- ☐ Continue to supervise the dogs together; through joint walks and playtime, then allow them to interact freely when you're confident they both seem relaxed around each other.



Introducing your existing cat to a new dog

- ☐ When [introducing a new dog or puppy](#) to the family cat, plan ahead to make sure your cat has plenty of high resting places to retreat to, and that the new dog has no access to your cat's food, water, sleeping and toileting areas.
- ☐ Consider crate training your new dog or puppy to make introductions safer.
- ☐ Introduce your new dog to your cat when your dog is feeling calm and is ideally in a crate with a chew or toy for distraction. Use a room where your cat has plenty of escape options if they wish to retreat and give your cat lots of attention as they get used to being in the same room as your new dog.
- ☐ Once they both seem relaxed, progress to having your dog on a leash while your cat is present and give both of them treats and praise to reward calm behaviour. Remove your dog from the room if they become overly excited.
- ☐ Start with short meetings several times a day for a few weeks until you feel confident about allowing your pets to meet without restraining your dog on a leash, but continue to closely supervise them.
- ☐ Allow your cat to choose whether to interact with your dog. This must not be forced as your cat will find this stressful.
- ☐ Give your cat lots of individual attention during this period.
- ☐ Continue to supervise your pets until you are certain you can safely leave them alone together.
- ☐ Your cat must always have an escape route to somewhere where they feel safe.
- ☐ Above all, take things slowly. Follow similar procedures when [introducing a new cat or kitten](#) to the family dog.



Introducing your pet to a baby



- ☐ Give your pet plenty of time to adjust to any changes in their usual routines before the baby arrives. This may include giving your cat a new special place to sleep apart from your bed or having someone else walk your dog in the morning.
- ☐ [Prepare your pet for the baby's arrival](#) by playing recordings of baby sounds and giving them treats so they associate the sound with something good.
- ☐ Present your pet with a blanket with the baby's scent and give them treats as they get used to this.
- ☐ Introductions should occur with your pet at a safe distance from the baby, supervised by another adult. Keep these meetings short and positive and slowly extend the contact.
- ☐ Continue to provide your pet with quality time and attention each day, including exercise.
- ☐ When you are with your baby, make this a positive experience for your pet by using rewards, such as giving them a treat while you feed the baby at a safe distance.
- ☐ Provide your pet with enrichment toys when you are focused on caring for your baby.
- ☐ Above all, take things slowly and never leave your pet unsupervised with a child.
- ☐ Consider a training course such as an RSPCA training course, if one is available in your state or territory.

Introducing your pet to a new partner



- ☐ Pets can find changes in their homes including the people in them stressful, so take all introductions slowly.
- ☐ Start by bringing home an item of [clothing with the scent of your new partner](#) and allow your pet to sniff this while giving them a reward. This way your pet will associate your partner with good things before they meet!
- ☐ If you have a dog, introduce your pet and partner on neutral territory for their first meeting. An outdoor café that allows dogs is a great choice.
- ☐ Don't force the introduction but allow your pet to approach your partner at their own pace and have treats handy for your partner to feed your pet directly or by throwing the treats on the ground.
- ☐ Include your partner in your favourite activities such as visiting the dog park.
- ☐ When your pet is comfortable being stroked or patted by your partner, encourage your partner to offer treats and praise.
- ☐ Gradually have your partner visit the house, using the same approach of offering your pet rewards with treats, praise or games.
- ☐ Make sure to continue your own special time and routines with your pet if your partner moves in, but also include them, such as at feeding time.



Conclusion

Using these tips will help you to safely introduce your pets to any new members of your household, including new furry friends! If things don't go smoothly, and especially if any of your pets show signs of stress, seek the advice of your veterinarian, who may refer you to an animal behaviourist.

Taking care of your new pet is a long-term commitment and although it's not always possible to avoid a trip to the vet, you can be prepared and help your back pocket against potential vet bills from an accident or illness by taking out an [RSPCA Pet Insurance](#) policy.



For more information call 1300 855 150
between 8am - 8pm Monday to Friday AEST.