



Aurora 345652: What to Expect

Aurora is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Aurora is a sensitive but sweet girl who is ready to find her forever home. She will be timid at first, but once she feels safe, she enjoys gentle cheek and chin scratches and taking lazy naps on soft blankets. Aurora may never be a social butterfly with everyone she meets, but with patience and time to build trust, she will form a strong, loving bond with her person.

Aurora came to Oregon Humane in March from another shelter, and at that time, we had very limited information about her history. She was adopted shortly after arriving but was returned four months later due to consistently hiding in the adopter's home. In the adopter's home, Aurora immediately sought refuge in a kitchen cabinet and would not come out. The adopter used several aversive techniques in an attempt to coax her out, which appeared to increase Aurora's fear and anxiety in her environment. On one occasion, when the adopter reached into the cabinet to retrieve her, Aurora scratched and bit the adopter's arm. The injury was minor and required only basic first aid. We believe Aurora felt cornered and threatened while hiding in the cabinet, and that the forced interactions contributed to her defensive response. Aurora was not provided with a separate room or appropriate hiding spaces where she could safely acclimate at her own pace when she first arrived, which likely made it difficult for her to feel secure and develop a trusting relationship with the adopter. After 4 months in this home, she was brought back to the shelter.

Based on the information provided to us upon her return, the decision was made to place her in our Behavior Modification program. The environment in the BMOD program is better suited at helping cats feel comfortable in a shelter environment. With the larger kennel space, access to windows, increased enrichment, and dedicated one-on-one time with our team, we were able to help her decompress and learn more about her personality.

Aurora was nervous for the first few weeks in the BMOD program and spent most of her time watching us with wide eyes from her cat tower. In the beginning she would cower and back away when we approached, but we understood this was her way of communicating that she was scared. To help her build confidence and trust, the team focused on a calm, consistent presence—speaking softly to her and simply sitting nearby so she could become comfortable with us at her own pace and pairing these interactions with tasty treats. It didn't take long to discover that she loves treats. Aurora began to readily eat the treats we offered her in our presence, and her body language began to relax.

Although Aurora became more comfortable around us, she still struggled when hands approached to pet her and would often shrink back or cower if we reached toward her. To help her build positive associations with touch, we introduced a touch tool—an object that acts as an extension of the hand. In Aurora's case, we used a back scratcher.

When we first introduced Aurora to the back scratcher, she would lean forward to investigate and sniff it. As we gently touched her cheek with it, she quickly relaxed and leaned into the contact, clearly enjoying the interaction. When she is especially happy and comfortable, she'll even roll around flirtatiously, drool, and purr with contentment.

Although Aurora readily accepted and enjoyed being touched with the back scratcher, she continued to cower when we tried to pet her with our hands. This suggested that she may have had negative experiences with hands in the past.

Rather than forcing the interaction, we continued using the back scratcher to help her build trust and confidence at her own pace.

After several weeks of using the back scratcher, Aurora began accepting and enjoying gentle pets from hands. It became clear that what she needed most was time and the opportunity to build positive relationships with people before feeling completely comfortable with hands-on affection.

Today, Aurora has formed bonds with several members of our team and happily looks forward to visits from the people she trusts. She now enjoys being petted by staff she has built relationships with, but getting to that point took patience and time. Her future adopters should be prepared to give her that same patience, allowing her to set the pace as she learns that she is safe, loved, and can trust her people.

Aurora is a laid-back girl who isn't overly active and is happiest enjoying cozy naps on soft blankets, watching wildlife from the window, and indulging in her favorite treats. She has met several cats during her time here and does well with calm, respectful feline companions. Aurora may enjoy having a kitty friend in her new home to peacefully coexist with, though she would also be perfectly content as the only cat. A home with a calm, easygoing cat would be the best fit for her. If your cat enjoys rough-and-tumble play or tends to be overly energetic with other cats, Aurora would likely prefer a more relaxed companion.

What Aurora needed most to thrive was a calm, peaceful environment and the time and patience to observe her surroundings and develop a sense of safety at her own pace. Through treats and gentle, slow-paced interactions, we were able to help her form positive associations with people while building her confidence and trust. She will do best in a quiet, patient home with someone who understands that trust takes time and is willing to let her settle in at her own pace. With patience, consistency, and a little understanding, Aurora can continue to blossom into the sweet and affectionate cat she is becoming.

Her new family should be prepared for the possibility that she may hide for a few weeks, or even longer, as she adjusts to her new environment. During this time, it's important to introduce her to new experiences slowly and at her own pace. Aurora may hiss, swat, or retreat when she feels overwhelmed or scared, so creating a safe, calm space for her is essential. Set her up in a small, quiet room where she can relax and feel secure, with appropriate hiding spots such as a covered bed or enclosed hideaway. At the same time, avoid hiding places that are completely inaccessible, like tight spaces under heavy furniture, as these can make it difficult to build trust and bond with her. The setup of her initial room will play a major role in how quickly she begins to acclimate. Consider carefully which room in your home would be best. If it's a bedroom, think about whether she could get under the bed or dresser in a way that limits interaction. If it's a bathroom or laundry room, consider whether frequent noise and traffic might be overwhelming for her. Choose a space that is quiet, low-traffic, and allows you to interact with her in a gentle, consistent way. This will help her feel safe while still giving you opportunities to build trust. While she is in her hiding spot, use a calm voice and offer positive reinforcement through treats and gentle pets using the back scratcher. You can place a small amount of wet food or a treat on a spoon and offer it near her safe space. Over time, repeated gentle interactions like this can help her learn that people are associated with positive experiences, such as food and safety, which will gradually build her confidence and trust.

Here's how to help Aurora during your first months together:

This step is crucial in helping Aurora acclimate to her new home. Confine Aurora to one cat-proof room in your house. Provide Aurora with a litter box, food, water, and a bed. Ensure she cannot get to *inappropriate* hiding spots (under the bed, in a closet, on top of a cabinet, etc.). Instead, provide her with a safe, comfortable hiding place like her cat carrier, a hidey-bed, or a large dog crate covered with a blanket.

Spend time with Aurora in her room. Don't force her out of her hiding spot. Instead, encourage her to come out on her own using happy talk, offering a toy or treats. Once she is using the litter box, eating regularly, and coming out of hiding to interact with you, you can start introducing her to the rest of your home. Start by propping the door open and allowing her to come out on her own. Don't force it! If you come across something that you can tell Aurora is worried about, allow her to hang back or hide if she chooses to do so.

Continue to provide a safe space. Even when Aurora has started exploring the rest of the house, give her a safe space that she can retreat to. When she is in her safe space, insist that guests leave her alone and try to ignore her yourself. That way, when she comes out, you can reward her bravery with your attention.

No visitors (at first). Allow Aurora time to adjust to your house, routine, and lifestyle before introducing her to new people. When you have visitors over, give Aurora the freedom to make the decision to interact (or not!). Ask new people to ignore her – or if Aurora seems curious or interested, have the new person toss her treats or offer a favorite toy. We want exciting, good things to come from new people.

Practice crate training. Leave her carrier out all the time, so it's just a part of her normal environment. Add a bed and keep the door securely propped open so she can go in and out on her own, making sure the door won't swing shut and frighten her. You can also clicker train her to run into the carrier on cue. Helping Aurora get comfortable with her carrier will make it easier when it's time to visit the vet.

Visiting the vet: Unless it's an emergency, give Aurora time to bond to you before taking her to the vet. Vet visits will more than likely be scary, but if she already trusts you, your presence may help her feel more comfortable.

Patience will come in handy for you. Aurora is a cat that needs an understanding owner who has the time and desire to allow her to adapt in her own time. She may never be a social butterfly, and that's okay! Getting to know her and watching her come out of her shell will be extremely rewarding. Celebrate those small victories.

We're here to help!

We want Aurora to be successful in her new home. We are available to answer questions via phone and email. Call the Behavior helpline at (503)416-2983 or email the BMOD Cat trainers at bmodcat@oregonhumane.org to connect with the Feline Behavior Modification department.

Please keep in touch so we can continue to support you and Aurora now and in the future. Please reach out if you have any questions or concerns – or just to give an update. We love to see photos and hear how our friends are doing!

Thank you for adopting from the Oregon Humane Society. Congratulations on your new cat!