Mitch 358450*:* What to Expect

Mitch is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Mitch is a sweet and sensitive boy who is ready to find his forever home. Mitch may be a little timid at first, but once he feels safe and secure, his charming personality shines through. He loves spending time lounging on his cat tower, gazing out the window, snacking on treats and being pet by the people he has befriended here. While Mitch may never be a social butterfly with everyone he meets, with patience and time to build trust, he'll form a deep bond with his special person and blossom into an affectionate and fun-loving companion.

Mitch came to OH from the home of an overwhelmed cat caregiver who was unable to provide proper care for him. When he arrived, he exhibited fearful and shy behaviors that were presented as hiding, cowering and hissing whenever staff attempted to engage with him. Due to the level of stress he was displaying and the impact it had on his ability to comfortably interact with staff, he was enrolled 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 him decompress and learn more about his personality.

Mitch was worried and overwhelmed during his first few days in BMOD. He spent much of his time hiding on his cat tower, quietly watching us with wide, cautious eyes. If anyone approached too closely, he would hiss to let us know he was frightened and needed space. We respected his boundaries, spoke to him softly, and gave him the time he needed to feel safe. It didn't take long for us to discover one of Mitch's favorite things: food! Treats, especially Churus, quickly became the key to winning his heart. We paired our visits and interactions with these tasty rewards, helping Mitch learn that people could bring good things rather than fear or stress. With patience, consistency, and plenty of treats, Mitch gradually began to build trust and confidence in his human friends. Before long, he started looking forward to staff visits, and each day we noticed his body language becoming more relaxed in our presence.

Although Mitch became increasingly comfortable in our presence, he remained hesitant when hands approached to pet him. To help him feel more at ease, we introduced a touch tool which is an object that serves as an extension of our hand. In Mitch's case, we used a back scratcher to gently introduce the experience of being touched. When we brought it near him, he would lean forward to investigate and sniff. We slowly began using it to gently scratch his cheeks, and before long, Mitch was leaning into the touch and clearly enjoying the attention. As Mitch's confidence grew, so did his trust in people. With time, he became increasingly comfortable with gentle affection and now leans into cheek, chin, and full-body pets once he feels safe, often headbutting for more attention.

Each day, we gently encouraged Mitch to experience new things, from discovering different toys to venturing beyond his kennel and exploring the world around him. He quickly revealed his playful side and love of toys, eagerly stalking, chasing, and pouncing on them as we tossed them through the air. He also has a special fondness for catnip and absolutely delights in rolling around in it!

Mitch also showed a natural curiosity about the other cats in our program. Whenever he spotted them, he would greet them with adorable chirps and trills, showing just how interested he was in making feline friends. We began introducing him to other cats through supervised playdates, and he quickly formed friendships with several of them. Today, Mitch has made himself right at home in our communal cat room, where he enjoys the company of his feline friends around the clock. He can often be found peacefully napping alongside them or happily playing with toys together.

Mitch has blossomed into the sweet, happy boy we always knew he could be. Although sudden movements or unfamiliar situations can still startle him, causing him to briefly retreat to a hiding spot, he recovers quickly with gentle reassurance and kind words. He has made tremendous progress during his time in the BMOD program, and we're confident he will continue to flourish in the right home. Mitch will do best in a calm, quiet home with someone that can be patient with him as he acclimates. He also may enjoy having a feline friend in his new home.

His new family should expect that he will hide for a few weeks, possibly longer. You'll need to introduce him to new things slowly. Mitch typically flees and hisses when overwhelmed or scared. It's important to provide him with a small room with appropriate hiding spots for him to relax in, such as his own hidey bed. Hiding spots that are confined to a tight spot and out of reach from you will make it difficult to build a bond with him. The room you set him up in will be the catalyst for how quickly he acclimates. Start thinking now which room in your home would be best for Mitch to settle into. If it's a bedroom, can he get under the bed or dresser making it difficult to spend time with him? If it's a laundry room or bathroom will the constant in and out of people and noises associated with these rooms be too much for him? By having a room without a lot of foot traffic and with appropriate hiding spots, it will allow you to work on building a relationship. While in his hiding spot, use calm voices and offer tasty treats to show you are not a threat. Place a small amount of wet food or a treat on a spoon and offer it to Mitch while in his hidey spot. Over time, by continuing to do this, Mitch will become more comfortable and recognize that yummy food = people, therefore creating a positive association between the two.

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

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

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

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

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

Practice crate training. Leave his carrier out all the time, so it's just a part of his normal environment. Add a bed and keep the door securely propped open so he can go in and out on his own, making sure the door won't swing shut and

frighten him. You can also clicker train his to run into the carrier on cue. Helping Mitch get comfortable with his carrier will make it easier when it's time to visit the vet.

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

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

We're here to help!
We want Mitch to be successful in her new home. We're 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 help you and Mitch 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!