

Conflict in Multicat Households

Bonnie V. Beaver, DVM, MS, DSc (Hon), DPNAP, DACVB, DACAW
Texas A&M University
Beaver Consulting
College Station, Texas

In the Literature

Elzerman AL, DePorter TL, Beck A, Collin JF. Conflict and affiliative behavior frequency between cats in multi-cat households: a survey-based study. *J Feline Med Surg*. 2019. doi: 10.1177/1098612X19877988

FROM THE PAGE ...

Approximately 40% of US homes include cats,^{1,2} and homes with cats are more likely to have multiple animals, averaging 1.8 cats each.² Close contact among cats, however, can be associated with an increase in behavior problems; urine spraying and urinating outside the litter box are significantly more common in multicat homes.³ Conflict behaviors—from tail twitching to aggressive interactions—can also occur and cause stress within the household.

This study represents the first large statistical evaluation of intercat relationships in households and the factors that may influence them. Multicat homes included in this study ($n = 2492$) had between 2 and 4 cats.

Affiliative behaviors among individual cats were found to be more common than conflict signs. These behaviors included sleeping in the same room as another cat, grooming another cat by licking around the head or ears, sleep-touching with another cat, and nose-touching with another cat. Almost 90% of cats slept in the same room as other cats at least once a day, and cat-cat touching was observed during $\approx 50\%$ of this time. Mutual grooming of the head and ears was also common.

Conflict signs were slightly less common, although the frequency of signs increased as cat numbers increased. The number of conflict signs that owners could report was limited to 7 and included staring, chasing, stalking, fleeing, tail twitching, hissing, and wailing/screaming. Almost 75% of owners noticed conflict when a new cat was introduced into the home, and in $\approx 50\%$ of cases, conflict among the cats continued over time. Staring and

chasing conflict signs occurred at least daily in 44% of cats, with stalking occurring in 35% of cats. Almost 17% of households reported intercat aggression, indicating potential for clinics to provide behavioral treatment.

These results were obtained through an internet survey; thus, responders were self-selective and may or may not be representative of all cat owners. Nevertheless, the sample size of 2492 multicat households containing 6431 cats yields good insight into intercat relationships.

... TO YOUR PATIENTS

Key pearls to put into practice:

- 1** Recommending ways to promote friendly introductions of new cats into the home can result in fewer negative interactions among household cats.
- 2** Results from this survey appear to indicate that owners observe their cat's behavior; thus, asking questions regarding behavioral concerns during routine visits may provide opportunities for earlier intervention.
- 3** Developing protocols for intercat aggression can be helpful for owners with cats prone to conflict.

References

1. American Pet Products Association. Pet industry market size & ownership statistics. American Pet Products Association website. https://www.americanpetproducts.org/press_industry-trends.asp. Accessed January 2020.
2. American Veterinary Medical Association. 2017-2018 AVMA Pet Ownership and Demographics Sourcebook. American Veterinary Medical Association website. <https://www.avma.org/sites/default/files/resources/AVMA-Pet-Demographics-Executive-Summary.pdf>. Accessed April 22, 2020.
3. Barcelos AM, McPeake K, Affenzeller N, Mills DS. Common risk factors for urinary house soiling (periuria) in cats and its differentiation: the sensitivity and specificity of common diagnostic signs. *Front Vet Sci*. 2018;5:108.