

Scratching of Inappropriate Objects by Cats

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In the Literature

Moesta A, Keys D, Crowell-Davis S. Survey of cat owners on features of, and preventative measures for, feline scratching of inappropriate objects: a pilot study. *J Feline Med Surg.* 2018;20(10):891-899.

FROM THE PAGE ...

Scratching of inappropriate objects is a frequent complaint of cat owners, with an incidence as high as 83.9% reported in this study of 116 cats. Destruction of property is a common reason given for relinquishment (12.4%) and is the most common reason a cat is presented for declawing (69%-78%).^{1,2} It is paramount that clinicians understand normal feline scratching behavior and best practices for modifying that behavior to protect animal welfare, maintain the human-animal bond, and prevent inappropriate interventions and unnecessary surgeries.³

Most study cats demonstrated a preference for inappropriately scratching furniture (81.5%) and carpet (64.1%) and, particularly, items oriented vertical to the ground. This is important to consider when looking at scratching prevention. The survey revealed that cats were more likely to use scratching posts positioned vertically as compared with scratching pads. A preference for substrate was not identified in this study, although a separate, previously published survey found sisal rope and carpeting to be preferred by cats.⁴

A number of punishment-based methods were used by owners to prevent cats from scratching inappropriate items and included yelling, clapping, spraying water or air, shaking a rattle can, throwing things at the cat, and spanking the cat. None of these methods were found to be effective. Owners who attempted to teach their cats to scratch a design-

ated item by placing the cat near the scratch post/pad actually caused their cats to be *less* likely to scratch the designated item as compared with owners who did not use this method. Although this study did not identify any method that may help increase the incidence of appropriate scratching, the aforementioned previous survey found that owners who rewarded their cat for appropriate scratching saw an increase in their cat using the preferred scratch post.⁴

... TO YOUR PATIENTS

Key pearls to put into practice:

- 1** A vertical scratching post covered in sisal rope or carpet should be provided to cats to help prevent inappropriate scratching.
- 2** Owners should be educated that punishment is ineffective in eliminating inappropriate scratching and that carrying a cat to its scratching post will make it less likely to use it.
- 3** Owners should be educated that positive reinforcement (eg, rewarding a cat for scratching appropriately with verbal praise, food, or playtime) is the approach most likely to provide the desired results.

References

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4. Wilson C, Bain M, DePorter T, Beck A, Grassi V, Landsberg G. Owner observations regarding cat scratching behavior: an internet-based survey. *J Feline Med Surg.* 2016;18(10):791-797.