

The Ultimate Guide To Cat Care



Presented By:



Our Mission

Metairie Small Animal Hospital is committed to providing the highest quality medical and surgical care for our patients in a humane, compassionate and caring environment. We will strive to maintain an open, honest relationship with our clientele. We will constantly improve our care and skills through educational enhancement and personal dedication to our profession.



GENERAL HOSPITAL INFORMATION



OUR DOCTORS:

Dr. Rene Baumer (Partner) has a passion for Veterinary Medicine, but his main interests are orthopedics and soft tissue surgery.

Dr. Chris Fabacher (Partner) has been practicing here since 1984 and has a strong interest in orthopedic and general surgery.

Dr. Daryl Haydel (Partner) enjoys all aspects of small animal medicine, particularly brachycephalic surgery and laser surgery.

Dr. Siegfried Mayer (Partner) takes special interest in general surgery, orthopedics and laser oncology surgery.

Dr. Brian Melius (Partner) is the current President of MSAH and has been practicing at MSAH since 1983.

Dr. Allison Steele Wegmann (Partner) has special interest in ultrasound, internal medicine and soft tissue surgery.

Dr. Joe Vaccaro (Junior Partner) is interested in internal medicine, as well as soft tissue and orthopedic surgery.

Dr. Gordy Labbe enjoys all aspects of veterinary medicine, he has special interests in cardiology, internal medicine, and stem cell therapy.

Dr. Michael Graham II received his doctorate of veterinary medicine degree in 2014 and has been working at MSAH since.

Dr. Angella Dorsey-Oresto is MSAH's Director of Emergency Services and is a member of the Veterinary Emergency & Critical Care Society.

Dr. Diana Tran received her doctorate of veterinary medicine in 2011 and has interests in dermatology, behavior, and surgery.

Dr. Mary Brewington worked at MSAH throughout high school, college, and vet school, and rejoined the team as a doctor in 2016.

Dr. Rachel Wier graduated from Texas A&M University, receiving a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine in 2015.

Dr. Meredith Addison graduated from LSU School of Veterinary Medicine and worked in Las Vegas, NV, for a year before coming to MSAH.

Dr. Megan Mayer worked at MSAH throughout high school and college, and came back to practice here in 2017.

Dr. Samantha Glisson attended the University of Florida, and in 2017, graduated as a member of the veterinary honor society, Phi Zeta.

Dr. Alex Juneau attended LSU and received his doctorate of veterinary medicine in 2014 and began practicing at MSAH in 2017.

IN EMERGENCY:

Our full-service, 24 hour animal hospital is located at:

101 Metairie Road

Metairie, LA 70005

504-835-4266

Our emergency vet hospital is staffed by highly experienced members of our veterinary team 7 days a week, 365 days a year. We have advanced training in emergency, trauma-based and critical care protocols, which ensures your pet is in the most capable hands and never alone.

REGULAR HOURS OF OPERATION:

Monday	7:00am to 7:00pm
Tuesday	7:00am to 7:00pm
Wednesday	7:00am to 7:00pm
Thursday	7:00am to 7:00pm
Friday	7:00am to 7:00pm
Saturday	7:00am to 5:00pm
Sunday	8:00am to 5:00pm



THE PHYSICAL EXAMINATION

The physical examination begins with collecting information about your pet's current activity, overall health status, appetite and activity level. If your pet is experiencing abnormal behavior any information you can provide will be helpful in pinpointing potential problems. The veterinarian will obtain your pet's temperature (normal temperature for a cat varies between 100 and 102.5 degrees) and body weight. They will also review some basic preventive health measures. This is a great time for us to provide you with educational information about your pet's health or behavior and answer any questions you may have.

Once we have collected information about your pet, the doctor will perform a complete head to tail physical examination. Your pet's eyes, ears, and mouth will be checked for any abnormalities. In addition, the veterinarian will palpate your pet's entire body, feeling for appropriate organ size and looking for any skin growths or masses. Your pet's heart and lungs will be auscultated for any abnormalities. During the examination, you will be asked additional questions in order to obtain an overall assessment of your pet's current health status. Depending on your pet's particular circumstance, your veterinarian may recommend certain laboratory or diagnostic tests for further evaluation.

Because our pet's age at a much faster rate than we do, it is important to have your pet examined at least once a year during the first six years of life and then increase the frequency to at least once every six months.

Following your veterinarian's recommendations will help ensure the health and happiness of your pet.



VACCINATIONS



When should my kitten be vaccinated?

There are many diseases that are fatal to cats. Fortunately, we have the ability to prevent many of these by the use of very effective vaccines. In order to be effective, these vaccines must be given as a series of injections. Ideally, they are given at about 8, 12 and 16 weeks of age, but this schedule will vary depending on several factors.

The routine vaccination schedule will protect your kitten from five diseases: Distemper, three respiratory organisms, and rabies. The first four are included in a combination vaccine that is given at 8, 12, and 16 weeks old. Rabies vaccine is given at 16 weeks of age. Leukemia vaccine is appropriate for any cat but a necessity if your cat does or will go outside or if you have another cat that goes in and out. This deadly disease is transmitted by contact with other cats, especially when fighting occurs.

Why does my kitten need more than one vaccination for feline distemper, upper respiratory infections, and leukemia?

When a kitten nurses its mother, it receives a temporary form of immunity through the mother's milk. This immunity is in the form of proteins called antibodies. For about 24-48 hours after birth, the kitten's intestines allow absorption of these antibodies directly into the bloodstream. This immunity is of benefit during the first few weeks of the kitten's life, but at some point, this immunity fails and the kitten must be able to make its own long-lasting antibodies. Vaccinations are used for this purpose. As long as the mother's antibodies are present, vaccinations do not "take." The mother's antibodies will neutralize the vaccine so the vaccine does not get a chance to stimulate the kitten's immune system.

Many factors determine when the kitten will be able to respond to the vaccines. These include the level of immunity in the mother cat, how much of the antibody has been absorbed, and the number of vaccines given to the kitten. Since we do not know when an individual kitten will lose the short-term immunity, we give a series of vaccinations. We hope that at least two of these will fall in the window of time when the kitten has lost the immunity from its mother but has not yet been exposed to disease. A single vaccination, even if effective, is not likely to stimulate the long-term immunity that is so important.

Rabies vaccine is an exception to this, since one injection given at the proper time is enough to produce long-term immunity.

INTESTINAL PARASITES

Do all kittens have worms?

Intestinal parasites are common in kittens. Kittens can become infected with parasites almost as soon as they are born. For example, the most common source of roundworm infection in kittens is the mother's milk. The microscopic examination of a stool sample will usually help us determine the presence of intestinal parasites. We recommend this examination for all kittens and then once a year for the lifetime of your cat. Even if we do not obtain a stool sample, we recommend the use of a broad-spectrum de-worming product that is safe and effective against almost all of the common worms of the cat. It is given at the first exam and repeated in about 3-4 weeks, due to the lifecycle of the parasite. Within 3-4 weeks the larval stages will have become adults and will need to be treated. After deworming, cats remain susceptible to reinfection with hookworms and roundworms. Periodic deworming throughout the cat's life is recommended for cats that go outdoors.



INTESTINAL PARASITES

What is the most common parasite in cats?

Tapeworms are the most common intestinal parasite found in adult cats. Cats become infected with them when they swallow infected fleas; the eggs of the tapeworm live inside the flea. When the cat chews or licks its skin as a flea bites, the flea may be swallowed. The flea is digested within the cat's intestine; the tapeworm hatches and then anchors itself to the intestinal lining. Therefore, exposure to fleas may result in a new infection in as little as two weeks. Cats infected with tapeworms will pass small segments of the worms in their stool. The segments are white in color and look like grains of rice. They are about 1/8 inch long and may be seen crawling on the surface of the stool. They may also stick to the hair under the tail. If that occurs, they will dry out, shrink to about half their size and become golden in color. Tapeworm segments do not pass every day or in every stool sample; therefore, inspection of several consecutive bowel movements may be needed to find them. We may examine a stool sample in our office and not see them then you may find them the next day at home. If you find them at any time, please notify us so we may provide the appropriate treatment.

Are there other parasites cats can get in their intestinal tract?

Yes, cats can also be susceptible to infections from Coccidia. Coccidia can cause loose stool, sometimes with blood, and is especially prevalent in kittens. It is found by analyzing a fecal sample, but because the parasite only sheds its eggs intermittently it can be missed on a single sample. For a kitten with persistent diarrhea, we often treat for this parasite even if it is not found.

Cats can also be infected with giardia, a protozoa that can infect people and dogs as well. It, too, causes persistent diarrhea and can be found either on fecal smears or by sending a stool sample to a laboratory for specific analysis.



FLEA CONTROL

One female flea can lay up to 2000 eggs in her lifetime which is why just **a few fleas can cause a significant infestation in a very short period of time.** The flea life cycle occurs in four stages: the egg stage, the larval stage, the pupae stage and finally the adult. Most typically, you only see the adult portion of this life cycle which accounts for only 5% of the total population. The presence of fleas can pose many health problems as well. Infection to the skin, tapeworms and anemia are a few of the health threats fleas can introduce. For a flea allergic pet, a single flea can cause such intense itching that your pet may chew out his hair and traumatize his skin. In addition, fleas can be carriers of several zoonotic diseases that can be dangerous to you and your family.

For cats (especially that go outside and have more exposure) a topical prevention called **Revolution** is recommended. This product is a topical **parasiticide** applied every month. **Revolution (selamectin)** kills and prevents adult fleas, flea eggs, ear mites, intestinal parasites (round and hookworms), and even protects against heartworms. **Cheristin** is a new topical product for cats that kills fleas and prevents infestations. This may be necessary if other topicals are not adequately controlling fleas on your pet.





Determining the most effective pest management approach can be confusing when there are so many products touting their own protocols and recommendations. The doctors at our hospital have spent a great deal of time researching the most effective products on the market in order to make flea control simple and easy for you. We hope you will follow our recommendation, as we are confident that our approach is the most ideal and cost effective method available.

EFFECTIVE FLEA CONTROL REALLY IS EASIER THAN EVER BEFORE!

WE RECOMMEND

Capstar - Oral pill. Use as needed to kill adult fleas within 30 minutes.

Revolution - Liquid monthly topical medication to be used 12 months a year.

Cheristin - Liquid monthly topical medication to be used 12 months a year.

EAR MITES

What are ear mites?

Ear mites are tiny insect-like parasites that live in the ear canal of cats (and dogs). The most common sign of ear mite infection is scratching of the ears. Sometimes the ears will appear dirty because of a black material in the ear canal; this material is sometimes shaken out. We can find the mites by taking a small amount of the black material from the ear canal and examining it under a microscope. Although they may leave the ear canals for short periods of time, these mites spend the vast majority of their lives within the protection of the ear canal. Transmission generally requires direct ear-to-ear contact. Ear mites are common in litters of kittens if their mother is infected with ear mites.



NUTRITION

What should I feed my kitten?

Diet is extremely important in the growing months of a cat's life. There are two important criteria that should be met in selecting a food for your kitten. We recommend a **HIGH QUALITY FOOD** made by a national cat food company (not a generic or local brand), and a form of food **MADE FOR KITTENS**. This should be fed until your kitten is about 12 months of age. We recommend that you only buy food that has the AAFCO certification. Usually, you can find this information very easily on the label. AAFCO is an organization that oversees the pet food industry. It does not endorse any particular food, but it will certify that the food has met the minimum requirements for nutrition. Most commercial pet foods will have the AAFCO label. Generic brands often do not have it. We recommend Hill's Healthy Advantage for Kittens, as it is an excellent diet for a growing kitten.

Feeding a dry or canned form of cat food is acceptable. Each has advantages and disadvantages. Dry food is typically less expensive and can be left in the cat's bowl for longer periods of time. If given the choice, the average cat will eat a mouthful of food about 12-20 times per day. The quality brands of dry food are just as nutritious as the canned diets and can be fed as the sole source of nutrition. As a rule, most veterinarians will recommend dry food for your kitten or a mixture of canned and dry. Canned food is often more appealing to the cat's taste; however, if you feed a very tasty food, you may run the risk of creating a cat with a finicky appetite. The semi-moist foods are high in sugar and not recommended for routine feeding.



NUTRITION

Table food is not recommended. Because it is generally very tasty, cats will often begin to hold out for this and not eat their well-balanced cat food. In addition, some human foods can be toxic to cats, so it is best to only offer a high quality commercial cat food. When giving your cats treats, be sure they are formulated for cats and keep the frequency of treat giving to a minimum. We enjoy a variety of things to eat in our diet however, most cats prefer not to change from one food to another. Do not feel guilty if your cat is happy to eat one food day after day, week after week.

Commercials for cat food can be misleading. Most commercials promote cat food on one basis, TASTE. Nutrition is rarely mentioned. Most of the “gourmet” canned foods are marketed to appeal to owners who want the best for their cats however, they do not offer any nutritional advantage over a good quality dry food and can be considerably more expensive. If your cat eats a gourmet food very long, he will probably not be happy with other foods. If he needs a special diet later in life due to a health problem, he may be very unlikely to accept it. Therefore, we do not encourage feeding gourmet cat foods.



NEUTERING/SPAYING

Why should I have my female cat spayed?

Spaying offers several advantages and is highly recommended. The female's heat period can result in about 2-3 weeks of obnoxious behavior. This can be quite annoying if your cat is kept indoors. Male cats are attracted from blocks away and, in fact, seem to come out of the woodwork. Your cat will continue to have a heat cycle every 2-3 weeks until she is bred.

Spaying is the removal of the uterus and the ovaries. Once a cat is spayed, heat cycles no longer occur. In many cases, despite your best efforts, unspayed females will often become pregnant; spaying prevents unplanned litters of kittens.

It has been proven that as female cats get older, there is a significant incidence of breast cancer and uterine infections if she has not been spayed. Spaying before she has any heat cycles will greatly decrease the chance of either. We recommend spaying your cat around 6 months of age, once all kitten vaccinations have been completed.



NEUTERING/SPAYING

Why should I have my male cat neutered?

Neutering offers several advantages. Male cats go through significant personality changes when they mature. They become very possessive of their territory and mark it with their urine to ward off other cats. The intact male cat's urine develops a very strong odor that will be almost impossible to remove from your house. They also try to constantly enlarge their territory, which means one fight after another. Fighting can result in severe infections. We strongly encourage you to have your cat neutered at about 6 months of age. If he should begin to spray his urine, he should be neutered immediately. The longer he sprays or fights, the less likely neutering will stop that behavior.

Can you recommend something for pet identification?

The latest in pet retrieval is microchipping. This tiny device is implanted with a needle so the process is much like getting an injection. Veterinarians, humane societies and animal shelters across the country have scanners that can detect the microchips. Once identified, the chip number can be entered into a national search, which will lead to your contact information. It is imperative that you register your pet's microchip information and make sure your contact info is kept up to date. A national registry permits the return of microchipped pets throughout the United States and Canada.



DENTAL DISEASE

What kinds of dental problems do pets have?

Dental disease is as common in dogs and cats as it is in humans. The most common form of dental disease in humans is caries (cavities). However, this is not the case in our pets. The most common form of dental disease is tartar buildup. This causes irritation of the gums around the base of the teeth (gingivitis), resulting in exposure of the roots. Ultimately, this leads to infection and tooth loss. One of the main factors determining the amount of tartar buildup is the individual chemistry in the mouth. Some dogs and cats need annual or biannual cleanings; others need a cleaning only once every few years.

What does tartar do to the teeth?

If tartar is allowed to remain on the teeth, several things may happen:

- 1) The tartar will mechanically push the gums away from the roots of the teeth. This allows the teeth to loosen in their sockets and infection to enter the root socket. The teeth will loosen and fall out or have to be extracted.
- 2) Infection will accumulate in the mouth, resulting in gingivitis, tonsillitis, and Pharyngitis (sore throat). Although antibiotics may temporarily suppress the infection, if the tartar is not removed from the teeth, infection will return quickly.
- 3) Infection within the mouth will be picked up by the bloodstream and carried to other parts of the body. Kidney and liver infections, as well as infections involving the heart valves, frequently begin in the mouth.



DENTAL DISEASE

What is involved in cleaning my pets' teeth?

Proper cleaning of the teeth requires complete cooperation of the patient so plaque and tartar can be removed properly. Anesthesia is required to thoroughly clean a cat's teeth. Although anesthesia always carries a degree of risk, the modern anesthetics in use in our hospital minimize this risk, even for older animals.

At our hospital we perform dental radiographs on all feline patients to ensure we do not miss any issues underneath the gum line. There are several steps in the teeth cleaning process:

1. **Scaling** removes the tartar above and below the gum line. This is done with hand instruments and ultrasonic cleaning equipment.
2. **Polishing** smoothes the surface of the teeth, making them resistant to additional plaque formation.
3. **Flushing** removes dislodged tartar from the teeth and helps to remove the bacteria that accompany tartar.
 - **Fluoride** coating decreases teeth sensitivity, strengthens enamel, and decreases the rate of future plaque formation.



How can I prevent this from recurring?

Seek regular veterinary care and have teeth cleaned professionally when advised. Maintain home dental care with regular brushing of the teeth. Special toothbrushes and toothpaste are available for cats. We also have several cat treats designed to help eliminate and prevent tartar. Our technicians can demonstrate proper home dental care and recommend an appropriate schedule.

FELINE IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) is an important disease agent of the cat. It is likened to the AIDS virus which affects humans because of the similarities in the two diseases. Fortunately, most viruses are species specific. This is the case with the human AIDS virus and with FIV. The AIDS virus affects only humans, and FIV affects only cats.

What cats are likely to be infected with the FIV?

FIV is transmitted primarily through bite wounds that occur when cats fight. Other interactions among cats, such as sharing common food and water bowls or grooming each other, have not been shown to be significant in transmission.

What are the clinical signs?

An **FIV** infected cat will generally go through a prolonged period of viral dormancy before it becomes ill. This incubation period may last as long as six years. Thus, we generally do not diagnose FIV in cats that are very young.

When illness occurs, we can see a variety of severe, chronic illnesses. The most common illness is a severe infection affecting the gums around the teeth. Abscesses from fight wounds, which would normally heal within a week or two, may remain active for several months. Respiratory infections may linger for weeks. The cat may lose weight and go through periods of not eating well; the hair coat may become unkempt. The cat may have episodes of treatment-resistant diarrhea. Ultimately, widespread organ failure can occur.



FELINE IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS

How is the diagnosis made?

Evidence of exposure to the FIV can be detected by a simple blood test. A positive test means the cat has been infected with the virus and will likely remain infected for the remainder of its life. A negative may mean that the cat has not been exposed; however, false negatives occur in a few situations.

Adult cats

1. From the time of initial virus inoculation into the cat, it may take up to three months for the test to turn positive. Therefore, for up to three months, the test may be negative even though the virus is present in the cat.
2. When some cats become terminally ill with FIV, the test may again turn negative. This occurs because antibodies (immune proteins) produced against the virus become attached and bound to the large amount of virus present. Since the test detects antibodies that are free in circulation, the test may be falsely negative. This is not the normal occurrence, but it does happen to some cats.



FELINE HEARTWORM DISEASE

- an emerging infectious disease of cats

Key Facts:

- Heartworm parasites are transmitted when a cat is bitten by an infected mosquito
- Both indoor and outdoor cats are at risk
- Emerging epidemic resulting from increased local rainfall and free-standing water which result in more mosquitoes
- Heartworm disease much different in dogs (heart disease) than cats (respiratory disease)
- Symptoms in cats include coughing, wheezing, lethargy, vomiting, sudden death
- Difficult to diagnose in cats
- **Cannot be cured in cats**
- Disease easily prevented in cats:
 - Revolution – a monthly topical treatment

*With multiple recent heartworm cases in our area, we HIGHLY recommend monthly prevent for all pets (cats and dogs)



Kittens

The vast majority of kittens under 3 months of age that test positive have not been exposed to the virus. Instead, the test is detecting the immunity (antibodies) that was passed from the mother to the kitten. We typically test kittens at 12 weeks of age. Any kitten that has tested positive prior to 12 weeks of age should be retested to ensure it was not a false “positive” result. Therefore, the kitten should be retested at about 6 months of age. If it remains positive, the possibility of true infection is much greater. If the kitten tests negative, there is no cause for worry.

If an FIV-infected cat bites a kitten, it can develop a true infection. However, the test will usually not turn positive for several months. If a mother cat is infected with FIV at the time she is pregnant or nursing, she can pass large quantities of the virus to her kittens. This means transmission may result in a positive test result in just a few weeks.



Kittens

Is treatment possible?

No treatments are available to rid a cat of FIV. However, the disease state can sometimes be treated with antibiotics or with drugs to stimulate the immune system restoring the cat to relatively good health. But, the virus will still be in the cat and may become active at a later date.

If you have a cat that tests FIV-positive but is not ill, it is not necessary to immediately euthanize it. As long as it does not fight with your other cats or those of your neighbors, transmission is not likely to occur. However, if it is prone to fight or if another cat often instigates fights with it, transmission is likely. In fairness to your neighbors, it is recommended to restrict an FIV-positive cat to your house. Owners of infected cats must be responsible so that the likelihood of transmission to someone else's cat is minimized.

Can this virus be transmitted to my family or me?

The feline immunodeficiency virus is cat-specific; it does not infect humans.

How can I prevent my other cats from getting infected with the FIV?

Neutering of male cats and keeping cats indoors are the only available preventive measures which can be recommended. If your cat is at high risk for development of this disease, please discuss it with your veterinarian.



KITTENS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEW OWNERS

How should I introduce my new kitten to its new environment?

A cat is naturally inclined to investigate its new surroundings. It is suggested that your kitten's area of exploration be limited initially. After confining your kitten to one room for the first few days, you should slowly allow access to other areas of your home.

How should I introduce my new kitten to my other cat?

Often, kittens receive a hostile reception from other household pets, especially from another cat. The other cat usually sees no need for a kitten in the household, and these feelings are reinforced if it perceives that favoritism is being shown to the kitten. The existing cat must not feel that it is necessary to compete for food or for attention. The new kitten should have its own food and food bowl, and it should not be permitted to eat from the other cat's bowl. Although it is natural to spend time holding and cuddling the kitten, the existing cat will quickly sense that it is being neglected. The new kitten needs lots of love and attention, but the existing cat should not be slighted. In fact, the transition will be smoother if the existing cat is given more attention than normal.



KITTENS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEW OWNERS

The introduction period will usually last one to two weeks and will have one of three possible outcomes.

1. The existing cat will remain **hostile** to the kitten. Fighting may occur occasionally, especially if both try to eat out of the same bowl at the same time. This is an unlikely occurrence competition for food and affection are minimized during the first few weeks.
2. The existing cat will only **tolerate** the kitten. Hostility will cease, but the existing cat will act as if the kitten is not present. This is more likely if the existing cat is very independent, has been an only cat for several years, or if marked competition occurred during the first few weeks. This relationship is likely to be permanent.
3. **Bonding** will occur between the existing cat and the kitten. They will play together, groom each other, and sleep near each other. This is more likely to occur if competition is minimized and if the existing cat has been lonely for companionship.



TERRITORIAL AGGRESSION: INTRODUCING A NEW CAT TO THE HOUSEHOLD

What is territorial aggression?

Territorial aggression may be exhibited toward people or other animals (usually cats) that approach or reside on the pet's property. Aggression can occur towards outside cats and also to cats that live in the household, especially new cats coming into the territory. This can occur with the addition of another cat or when resident cats reach social maturity at 1-2 years of age. Another situation is when one cat is removed from the household (perhaps for routine surgery or boarding) and aggression is exhibited when the cat is brought back into the home. This may be a mixture of territorial and fear aggression (perhaps the returning cat smells, looks or acts unfamiliar in some way).

Territorial aggression can manifest as stalking, chasing and aggressive encounters, which may lead to injury. At times the aggressor will prevent the victim from having access to certain areas of the home resulting in a cat that lives on top of furniture or bookshelves or under beds. This may be related to the social relationship (status) of each cat.

How can territorial aggression be prevented?

Territorial aggression can be prevented or minimized with early socialization, patient and slow introductions of new cats and adequate space, litter boxes and food bowls for cats. When a new cat is introduced (or reintroduced) into a household with existing cats, problems can best be prevented by slowly introducing the new cat to the environment, by keeping the new cat in a separate room with water and kitty litter, and supervising all interactions. We also recommend Feliway products, which can help calm your cat in stressful situations. If both cats have had adequate socialization with other cats, and are not too timid or fearful, it is usually only a matter of time before the cats work things out on their own, and are able to share the territory with little or no aggressive displays. However, in some homes, the aggression between cats persists and a more formal desensitization and counter-conditioning program may be required.



TERRITORIAL AGGRESSION: INTRODUCING A NEW CAT TO THE HOUSEHOLD



What is the best way to safely introduce (or reintroduce) a cat into the household?

In order to ensure that there are no injuries and that all introductions are positive, a desensitization and counter-conditioning program is the best way to ease a new cat into a household. Begin by confining the new cat to a room or portion of the home with its own litter and water. Allow the existing cat to continue to have access to the rest of the home. This arrangement provides a separate territory within the home for each cat, and allows both cats an opportunity to adapt to the smell and sounds of each other without the possibility of direct contact or physical confrontation. If the new cat is housed in a screened-in porch or a room with a glass door, it may also be possible to allow the cats to see each other through a safe partition. When the cats show no fear, anxiety, or threat toward each other, then progress to controlled exposure exercises. Training should occur when the cats can be occupied in a highly “rewarding” activity such as feeding, play, or treats. Provided both cats are far enough apart to minimize the possibility of aggression, and the reward is sufficiently appealing, the cats will focus on the rewards rather than each other. In addition, if the rewards are saved exclusively for these introduction times, the cats will quickly learn to expect “good things to happen” in the presence of each other. In addition to ensuring that the cats are at a safe enough distance to minimize fear, both cats (or at least the one that is likely to be the aggressor) can be confined to an open wire mesh cage or a body harness and leash. This will ensure that the cats can neither escape nor injure each other. It is safest to begin the first few introductions, not only at sufficient distance to reduce fear, but also with one or both cats in cages or on body harness and leash, so that they can neither retreat, or injure the other cat. If the cats have been in cages during the first training session, they can be placed in each other’s cages at the next session (so that the cats are exposed to the other cat’s odor). The cages can be moved progressively closer, provided the cats show no fear or anxiety and remain interested in the food. Once the cats will eat and accept exposure in either cage when close together, keep one cat in the cage and the other out during feeding. The situation is then reversed at the next session. As a final step the distance between cats can be increased again, with both cats out of their cages. A body harness and leash can be used to ensure additional safety. Over time the cats are fed closer together until a point where the cats can eat, or take treats, in each other’s presence.

TERRITORIAL AGGRESSION: INTRODUCING A NEW CAT TO THE HOUSEHOLD



Another way to integrate cats is with play therapy. Some cats are more interested in play, toys or catnip than they are in food. One of the best toys is a wand type or fishing rod type handle with a stimulating play toy such as a catnip mouse on the end for chasing and pouncing. Begin by having both cats play at a distance from each other. Over time, introduce the toys between the cats and let them play with the toys together.

What if the aggression between the cats persists?

Introductions must be done slowly. The cats need to be far enough apart that they are relaxed and will take food or a treat while in the presence of the other cat. If the cats will not eat then they are too anxious and probably too close together. Try moving the dishes further apart. If the cats still will not eat, be certain that they remain apart and do not give any food until the next feeding session. If the cats eat at that time repeat the same distance at the next feeding. If things go well, the next time the dishes can be moved closer together, but only by a small amount.

This is a slow process; you cannot rush things. Allowing either cat to interact in an aggressive manner sets the program back. The cats must remain separated except for times such as feeding when the cats are distracted, occupied, and engaged in an enjoyable act. In other words, good things are associated with the presence of the other cat. Another technique, which may help, is to rub the cats with towels and switch from one cat to the other to mix their scents.

Despite slow and careful progression, some cats may continue to display aggression, and it may be necessary to accept that they may never be compatible housemates. The only way to avoid territorial competition in these cats may be to find a new home for one of the cats, or to provide separate living quarters for each cat within the home. If the cats get along at certain times of the day, they can then be allowed limited exposure and interaction at these times. A leash and harness, or perhaps an air horn or squirt bottle, could be used to safely separate the cats should any aggressive displays emerge. If the problem is too severe, it may be helpful to medicate one or both cats. The option of drug therapy should be discussed with your veterinarian.

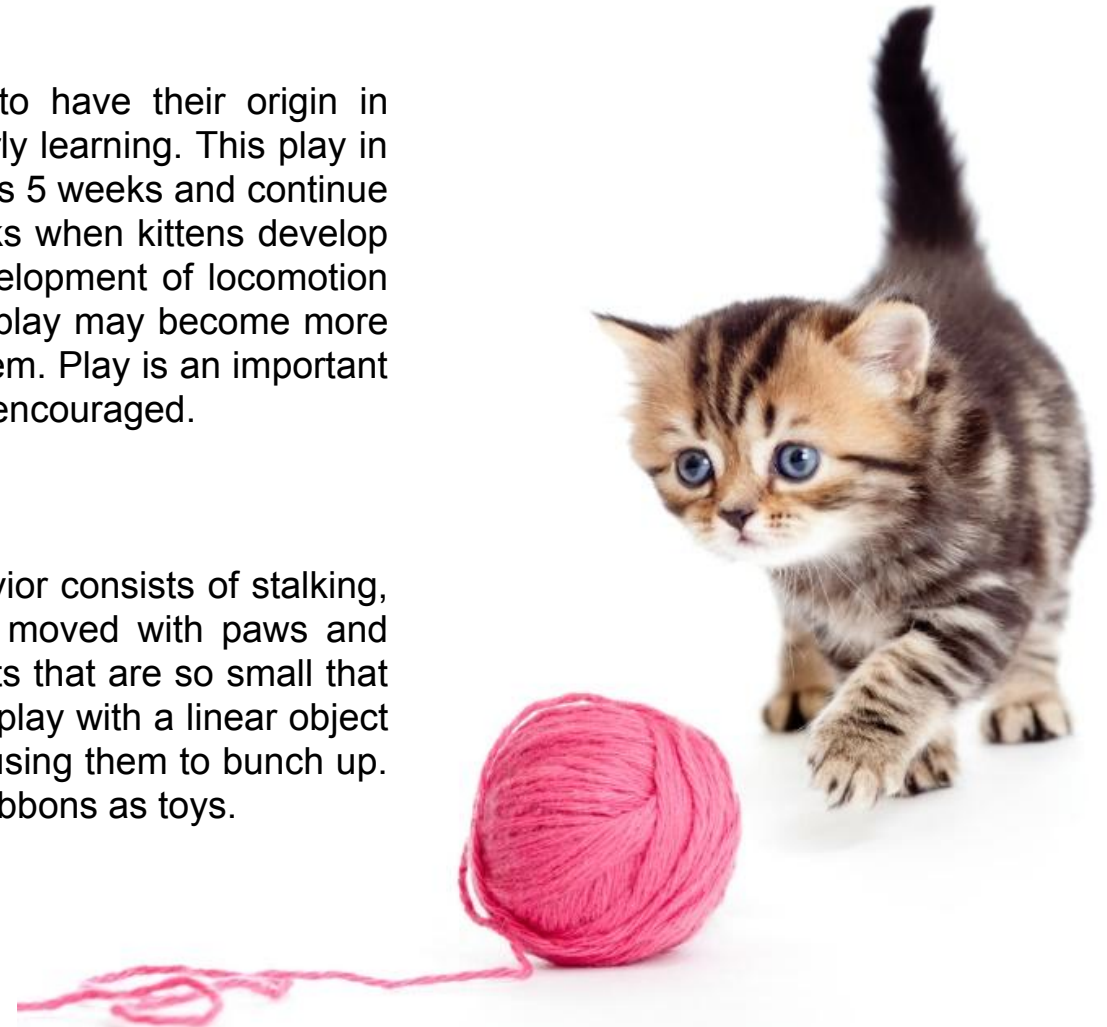
FELINE PLAY AND INVESTIGATIVE BEHAVIORS

How does play develop in kittens?

Young kittens play using chasing and pouncing behaviors that seem to have their origin in predation. Predatory play is an integral part of feline play behavior and early learning. This play in a kitten is often aggressive and intense. Kittens begin social play as early as 5 weeks and continue at a high level until about 12 -14 weeks. Object play develops at 7-8 weeks when kittens develop eye-paw coordination needed to deal with small moving objects. Full development of locomotion occurs between 10-12 weeks and as a kitten becomes more coordinated play may become more intense. Kittens are attracted to moving objects and will chase and stalk them. Play is an important component of kitten development, and proper play and exercise should be encouraged.

What is the best way to play with my kitten?

Kittens use multiple objects as prey items when they play. This play behavior consists of stalking, pouncing, jumping, biting and clawing. Small objects that can easily be moved with paws and grasped in the mouth or between the feet are often preferred. Avoid objects that are so small that they could be ingested and cause intestinal blockage. Some kittens like to play with a linear object like string. If eaten, a linear object can become lodged in the intestines causing them to bunch up. This is a life-threatening surgical emergency. Avoid using strings, yarn, or ribbons as toys.



FELINE PLAY AND INVESTIGATIVE BEHAVIORS

Why is my cat always getting into mischief?

Another important part of the development of young animals is the need for exploration and investigation of new objects and new environments. These behaviors can lead to damage to the home as well as injury to the kitten. Preventing these problems is quite simple; you accept your cat's needs to play and investigate. Provide suitable opportunities and outlets for your cat to perform these behaviors.

How can I prevent damage when I am not available to supervise?

When the cat cannot be supervised leave it in a cat-proof area, with soft comfortable bedding and a litter box for elimination. Although a large dog kennel may be an acceptable form of confinement for short departures, most cats can be confined in one or a few rooms that have been effectively cat-proofed. This allows the cat some freedom while preventing damage and injuries. Child locks and secure containers can be used to keep your cat out of cupboards or garbage cans. Any of your possessions or household objects that might be clawed, pounced on, explored, or knocked flying, should either be kept out of the cat's reach, or booby-trapped. Remember that with their excellent ability to jump and climb, damage prevention may also be needed far above floor level.

Booby-trapping (see below) can be used to teach your cat to "stay away" from specified areas by making the sites unpleasant. Before making an area unpleasant, the cat must have access to appropriate outlets to meet its innate needs.



FELINE PLAY AND INVESTIGATIVE BEHAVIORS



The cat should be provided with a post for scratching, some ledges or shelves for climbing and perching, and a few play toys that can be swatted, batted, or chased. Cat toys on springs and those that are hung from doors or play centers, ping pong balls, or catnip mice are often fun for cats to chase and attack. Cat play centers can be purchased or constructed to provide areas for perching and scratching in a relatively small compact area. Some cats like to explore new objects, so a few empty boxes or paper bags (never plastic) will keep some cats entertained until the owner has time to play. Sometimes the best solution is to get a second cat for companionship and play. Be certain that the second cat is young, sociable and playful.

Although some people think of confinement, cat-proofing and booby-trapping as unnecessary or cruel, they are precautionary measures to keep the cat safe and prevent damage to the household when the owners are not available to supervise. Common owner complaints such as chewing on plants, scratching, climbing or playing in inappropriate locations, or elimination outside of the litter area, are just a few of the potential problems that can best be prevented with a little planning and forethought. Then, when a family member is home and available to supervise, your cat should be given more freedom to explore and become accustomed to those areas of the home where problems might otherwise occur.

How can I successfully booby trap areas where problems persist?

Booby-trapping areas may be a simple matter of making the area less appealing by placing a less appealing surface in the area (such as a sheet of plastic or tin foil). Commercial products such as motion detectors or mats that emit an alarm are also available.

FELINE PLAY AND INVESTIGATIVE BEHAVIORS



What problems are associated with play?

There are a number of behavior problems that arise out of over-exuberant and inappropriate play. Some examples are cats that rambunctiously tear around the house, those that swat at or pounce on the owners (sometimes escalating into bites and injuries), and those that grasp, nip, bite or swat at the owners throughout the night.

How can over-exuberant play and play attacks toward people be prevented?

Before any attempts at stopping or interrupting the behavior are attempted, provide sufficient opportunities and outlets for play. Choose play toys and activities that are appealing to the individual cat. Since play that is initiated by the cat could potentially escalate into overly aggressive play, the owner should select play toys and initiate all play sessions. Sessions initiated by the cat should be ignored or interrupted using a distraction device, such as the ones listed below.

How can over-exuberant play and play attacks toward people be interrupted?

Although interruption devices may be effective, physical punishment should be avoided. First, pain can cause aggression. If you hit your cat you may increase the aggressive behavior. Second, painful punishment causes fear and owner avoidance. Third, owners that attempt to correct the playful aggression with physical contact may actually serve to reward the behavior.

For punishment to be effective it must be timed to occur while the behavior is taking place. Punishment should be species appropriate. Noise deterrents are often effective in cats. The noise can be made by you, but if not immediately successful a can of compressed air (used for cleaning camera lenses) may be more effective and less likely to cause fear or retaliation. Some cats need an even harsher noise. A jar of coins make extremely loud noises that will startle the cat and interrupt the behavior. What is most important in using these techniques is the timing. You must have the noisemaker with you so that you can immediately administer the correction.

FELINE MARKING BEHAVIORS

What is spraying?

Spraying is the deposition of small amounts of urine on vertical surfaces. The spraying cat may be seen to back into the area, the tail may quiver, and with little or no crouching the urine is released. Some cats will also mark their territory by leaving small amounts of urine or occasionally stool on surfaces.

Why do cats “mark” with urine?

Cats, often males, mark the locations where they live or which they frequent in many ways. Cats will mark with scent glands on their feet, cheeks, face and tail as well as with urine. Deposition of an odor communicates that the animal was in a location long after that animal has gone. Cats will mark their territory to signal “ownership” and to advertise sexual receptivity and availability. Marking can occur due to other cats in the vicinity either outdoors, or among cats that live in the same household. Cats will also mark their territory when they feel threatened or stressed. This can occur with a change in household routine, compositions, living arrangements, new living locations and other environmental and social changes. Because marking is a method of delineating territory, urine is often found in prominent locations and near windows, doors and heavily traffic areas in the home.



FELINE MARKING BEHAVIORS



Which cats are more likely to urine mark?

Both male and female cats can mark with urine. Urine marking is most common in intact (non-neutered) male cats. When an intact male sprays urine, it will have the characteristic “tom cat” odor that is strong and pungent. Neutering will change the odor, and may reduce the cat’s motivation for spraying, but approximately 10% of neutered males and 5% of spayed females will continue to spray. While cats in multiple cat households are often involved in spraying behaviors, cats that are housed singly may spray as well.

Instead of spraying, I am finding multiple locations of small amounts of urine. What does that mean?

Some cats will mark their territory with small amounts of urine (and on rare occasions, stool) in various locations. These locations can be similar to those for spraying, i.e. near doors, windows, new possessions in the home or favored locations, but may occasionally be found on owner’s clothing or other favored possessions. However, small amounts of urine deposited outside of the litterbox can also be an indication of numerous other problems including diseases of the lower urinary tract. Similarly stool found outside of the litter box can be due to a multitude of causes including colitis, constipation and any other condition leading to difficult, more frequent or uncomfortable elimination. As with any other elimination problem, a complete physical examination and laboratory tests are necessary to rule out each physical cause.

How do I treat a spraying or marking problem?

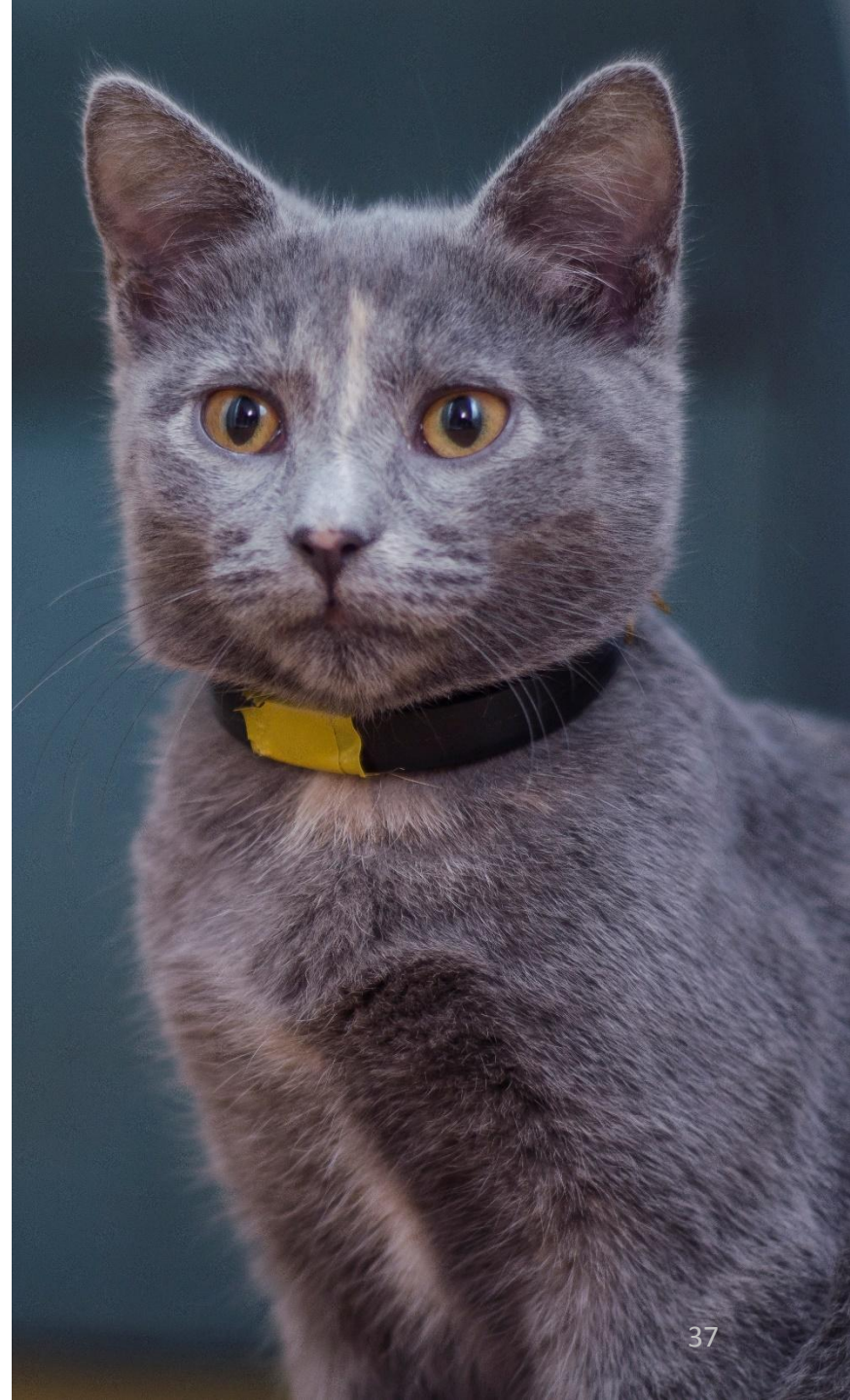
As with all behavior problems, the history will help determine treatment options. The location of the urine marking, the frequency, duration and number of locations are important. The number of cats inside the home, as well as contacts outside of the home, should be determined. Changes in environment, social patterns of humans and animals, and additions (people, pets, furniture, renovations) to the home should also be examined.

FELINE MARKING BEHAVIORS

If the cat is not already neutered, and is not a potential breeder, castration is recommended. A urinalysis should be performed to rule out medical problems. The location of the urine spots should be determined. Is the urine found on walls, 6-8 inches up from the floor, or are there small urine spots found in multiple locations?

Treatment is aimed at decreasing the motivation for spraying. If the problem is cats outside of the home, then the best option is to find a way to deter the cats from coming onto the property or prevent the indoor cat from seeing, smelling or hearing these cats. It may be helpful to house your cat in a room away from windows and doors to the outdoors, or it may be possible to block visual access to windows. When you are home and supervising you can allow your cat limited access to these areas. It may also be necessary to keep windows closed to prevent the inside cat from smelling the cats outside, and to use odor neutralizers on any areas where the outdoor cats have eliminated or sprayed.

If the problem is due to social interactions inside the home, it may be necessary to determine which cats do not get along. Keep these cats in separate parts of the home with their own litter and sleeping areas. Reintroduction of the cats may be possible when they are properly supervised. Allowing the cats together for positive experiences such as feeding, treats and play sessions helps them to get used to the presence of each other, at least on a limited basis. However, when numbers of cats in a home reach 7-10 cats you will often have spraying and marking.



FELINE MARKING BEHAVIORS



***I've cleaned up the spot but the cat keeps returning to spray.
What else can be done to reduce the problem?***

Since the “purpose” of spraying is to mark an area with urine odor, it is not surprising that as the odor is cleaned up, the cat wants to refresh the area with more urine. Cleaning alone does little to reduce spraying. Cats that mark in one or two particular areas may cease if the function of the area is changed. It is unlikely that cats will spray in their feeding, sleeping or scratching areas. Some cats are less likely to spray if a little of their cheek gland scent can be placed in the sprayed area. This may change the area to one of cheek gland marking and since the odor remains the desire to spray may be greatly reduced. A commercial product containing feline cheek gland scent has been recently introduced in Europe and is now available in the United States. The product is called Feliway® and is a synthetic pheromone designed to mimic cheek gland secretions from a cat. When sprayed on areas where cats have sprayed urine or on those areas where it can be anticipated that the cat is likely to spray, it may decrease the likelihood of additional spraying in those areas. The scent of the pheromone seems to calm the cat and may stimulate marking in the area by bunting (rubbing with their cheeks), rather than urine spraying. Feliway® has also been used to calm cats in new environments.

FELINE MARKING BEHAVIORS

Are there any drugs that are available to treat this problem?

Over the years many pharmacological means have been tried to control spraying behaviors. The choices have focused on the theory that one of the underlying causation for spraying and marking behaviors is anxiety. For that reason, anti-anxiety drugs such as buspirone and the benzodiazepines, antidepressants such as amitriptyline, clomipramine, fluoxetine and paroxetine, and female hormones have all been tried with varying degrees of success. None of these are presently FDA approved for use in cats, but are frequently prescribed for cats with off-label instructions approved by your veterinarian. Of course, if the underlying reason for spraying is not addressed, the problem is quite likely to occur when the drug is withdrawn.



FELINE SCRATCHING AND DECLAWING

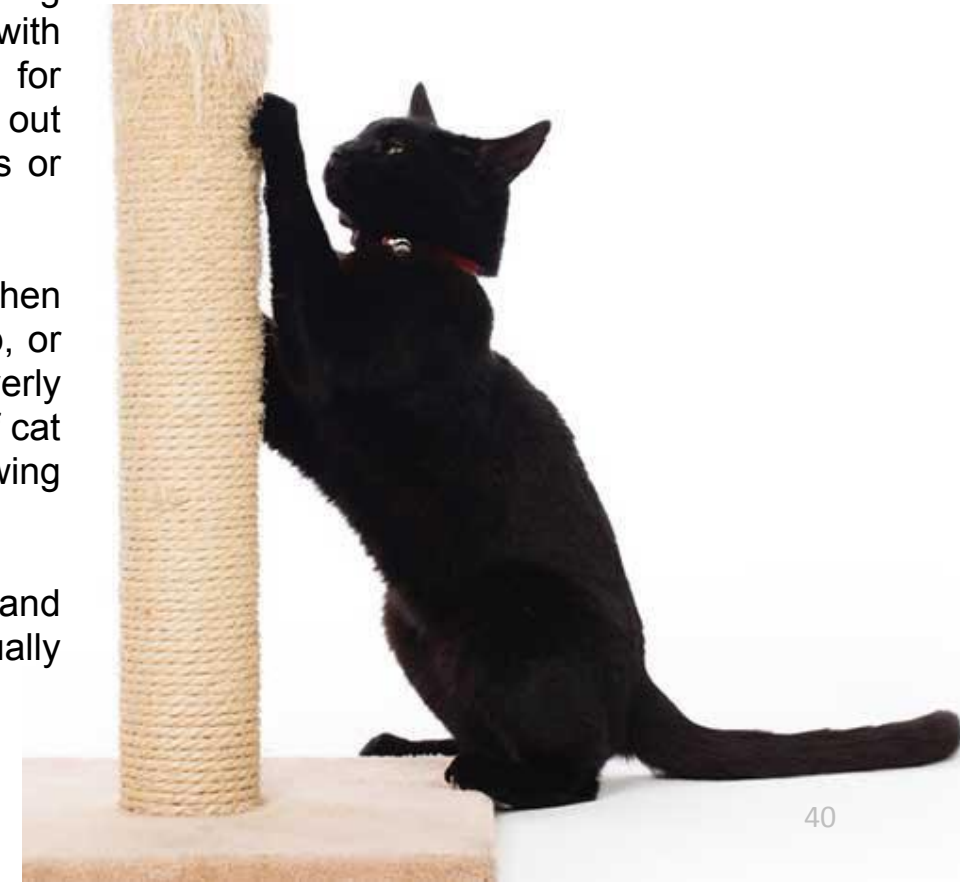
Why do cats scratch?

Scratching is a perfectly normal feline behavior. Although scratching does serve to shorten and condition the claws, the primary reasons that cats scratch are to mark their territory and to stretch. Cats may also threaten or play with a swipe of their paws.

For cats that live primarily outdoors, scratching is rarely a problem for the owners. Scratching is usually directed at prominent objects such as tree trunks or fence posts. Play swatting with other cats seldom leads to injuries because cats have a fairly thick skin and coat for protection. When play does get a little rough, most cats are pretty good at sorting things out between themselves. Occasionally, rough play or territorial fighting does lead to injuries or abscesses that would require veterinary attention.

Cats that live primarily or exclusively indoors may run into disfavor with their owners when they begin to scratch furniture, walls, or doors, or when they use their claws to climb up, or hang from the drapes. Claws can also cause injuries to people when the cats are overly playful or don't like a particular type of handling or restraint. With a good understanding of cat behavior and a little bit of effort, it should be possible to prevent or avoid most clawing problems, even for those cats that live exclusively indoors.

Cats that go outdoors may be content to scratch when outside, and leave the walls and furniture intact when indoors. Cats that spend most of their time indoors, however, will usually require an area for indoor scratching, climbing, and play.



FELINE SCRATCHING AND DECLAWING



How can I stop my cat from scratching?

It is impractical to expect cats to stop scratching entirely. Cats that go outside may be content to do all their scratching outdoors, but the urge may still arise when the cat comes back indoors. Cats that spend most of their time indoors will of course, need some outlet for their scratching and marking behaviors. While it may not be possible to stop a cat from scratching, it is possible to direct the scratching, climbing and play to appropriate areas indoors. Building or designing a scratching post, providing appropriate play toys, and keeping the cat away from potential problem areas will usually be adequate to deal with most scratching problems.

How do I design a scratching area for my cat?

Since cats use their scratching posts for marking and stretching, posts should be set up in prominent areas, with at least one close to the cat's sleeping quarters. The post should be tall enough for the cat to scratch while standing on hind legs with the forelegs extended and sturdy enough so that it does not topple when scratched. Some cats prefer a scratching post with a corner so that two sides can be scratched at once while other cats may prefer a horizontal scratching post.

Special consideration should be given to the surface texture of the post. Commercial posts are often covered with tightly woven material for durability, but many cats prefer a loosely woven material where the claws can hook and tear during scratching. Remember, scratching is also a marking behavior and cats want to leave a visual mark. Carpet may be an acceptable covering but it should be combed first to make certain that there are no tight loops. Some cats prefer sisal, a piece of material from an old chair, or even bare wood for scratching. Be sure to use a material that appeals to your cat.

FELINE SCRATCHING AND DECLAWING

How can I get my cat to use its post?

A good way to get the cat to approach and use the post is to turn the scratching area into an interesting and desirable play center. Perches to climb on, space to climb into, and toys mounted on ropes or springs are highly appealing to most cats. Placing a few play toys, cardboard boxes, catnip treats, or even the food bowl in the area should help to keep the cat occupied. Sometimes rubbing the post with tuna oil or catnip will increase its attractiveness. Food rewards can also be given if the owner observes the cat scratching at its post. Products have been designed to reward the cat automatically by dispensing food rewards each time the cat scratches. It may also be helpful to take the cat to the post, gently rub its paws along the post in a scratching motion, and give it a food reward. This technique should not be attempted, however, if it causes any fear or anxiety. Placement is important when trying to entice your cat to use a scratching post. Because scratching is also a marking behavior, most cats prefer to use a post that is placed in a prominent location. It may be necessary to place the post in the center of a room or near furniture that the cat was trying to scratch until the cat reliably uses it and then move it to a less obtrusive location. For some cats, multiple posts in several locations will be necessary.



FELINE SCRATCHING AND DECLAWING



What can I do if the cat continues to scratch my furniture?

Despite the best of plans and the finest of scratching posts, some cats may continue to scratch or climb in inappropriate areas. At this point a little time, effort, and ingenuity might be necessary. The first thing to consider is partial confinement or “cat proofing” your home when you are not around to supervise. If the problem occurs in a few rooms, consider making them out of bounds by closing off a few doors or by using childproofing techniques such as child locks or barricades. The cat may even have to be kept in a single room that has been effectively cat proofed when the owner cannot supervise. Of course the cat’s scratching post, play center, toys, and litter box should be located in this cat proof room.

If cat proofing is not possible or the cat continues to use one or two pieces of furniture, you might want to consider moving the furniture or placing a scratching post directly in front of the furniture that is being scratched. Take a good look at the surfaces of the scratched furniture and ensure that the surface of the post is covered with a material similar to those for which the cat has shown a preference. Some scratching posts are even designed to be wall mounted or hung on doors. Placing additional scratching posts in strategic areas may also be helpful for some cats. Keeping the cat’s nails properly trimmed is a useful techniques for some owners.

Can I trim my kitten's sharp toenails?

Kittens have very sharp toenails. They can be trimmed with your regular fingernail clippers or with nail trimmers made for dogs and cats. Be careful when trimming your cat’s nails as taking too much off can be painful and cause bleeding. It is best to just take the sharp tip off when trimming cat nails.

FELINE SCRATCHING AND DECLAWING

Therefore, a few points are helpful:

- a. If your cat has clear or white nails, you can see the pink of the quick through the nail. Avoid the pink area, and you should be out of the quick.
- b. If your cat has black nails, you will not be able to see the quick so only cut 1/32" (1 mm) of the nail at a time until the cat begins to get sensitive. The sensitivity will usually occur before you are into the blood vessel. With black nails, it is likely that you will get too close on at least one nail.
- c. If your cat has some clear and some black nails, use the average clear nail as a guide for cutting the black ones.
- d. When cutting nails, use sharp trimmers. Dull trimmers tend to crush the nail and cause pain even if you are not in the quick.
- e. You should always have styptic powder available. This is available for sale at our hospital and most pet stores.



FELINE SCRATCHING AND DECLAWING



How do I punish my cat for inappropriate scratching?

All forms of physical punishment should be avoided since they can cause fear or aggression toward the owners, and at best, the cat will only learn to stop the scratching while the owner is around. Indirect, non-physical forms of punishment may be useful if the owner can remain out of sight while administering the punishment. In this way the cat may learn that scratching is unpleasant even when the owner is not present. Spray bottles, ultrasonic or audible alarms, or remote control operated devices are sometimes useful.

Generally the best deterrents are those that train the pet not to scratch, even in the owner's absence. If the surface or area can be made less appealing, the cat will likely seek out a new area or target for scratching, which will hopefully be its scratching post. The simplest approach is to cover the scratched surface with a less appealing material (plastic, a loosely draped piece of material, aluminum foil, or double-sided tape). Another effective deterrent is to booby trap problem areas so that either scratching or approaching the area is unpleasant for the cat (e.g. motion detectors or a stack of plastic cups that is set to topple when the cat scratches). Of course, neither remote punishment nor booby traps will successfully deter inappropriate scratching, unless the cat has an alternative scratching area that is comfortable, appealing, well located, and free of all deterrents.

When should declawing be considered?

Declawing is a drastic but permanent solution for scratching problems, but for most households the scratching post and deterrent techniques discussed previously are generally quite successful. There are some homes however, where declawing may be the only option if the pet is to be kept in the home. This might be the case where the cat continues to damage the furniture, or where the cat causes injuries to people during play or handling. Even the slightest scratch can have serious consequences (cat scratch fever) when a member of the household suffers from a severely debilitating disease. In some cases the issue comes down to whether the owner should be able to keep their cat and have it declawed, or whether it should be removed from the home.

FELINE SCRATCHING AND DECLAWING



What is the effect of declawing on the cat?

Many authors have written of dire behavioral and surgical complications of declawing, but these reports are based on myths and anecdotes. In the past few years, a number of veterinary behaviorists and pet psychologists have studied the effects of declawing on the cat, the owner, and the cat-owner relationship. Some 10 scientific studies have examined the consequences of declawing on the pet and on the pet-owner relationship. These studies show that declawing does not alter the cat's behavior. In fact, cats may continue to scratch furniture after declawing, but cause no damage. There is no increase in behavior problems. Declawed cats are not at greater risk of getting bitten or injured in cat fights. Owners of declawed cats report a higher number of good behaviors than the owners of clawed cats. Except for a few days of post-surgical discomfort, quite surprisingly, the only owner concerns have been that some cats were reluctant to use the litter box when litter was replaced with paper strips. (Most veterinarians recommend that cat owners keep cats indoors and replace sandy or clay type litter with strips of paper for the first few days following declawing). This problem has now been greatly reduced by using recycled newspaper litter following declawing.

When owners of declawed cats are asked to assess the effects of declawing on the cat owner relationship, declawing always met or surpassed their expectations, and over 70% indicated an improvement in their relationship with their cat. Declawing allows people to keep their cat and stop household damage. We do recommend that declawed cats be kept indoors only since their primary means of defense has been removed.

CONTROLLING UNDESIRABLE BEHAVIOR IN CATS: THE ROLE OF PUNISHMENT



Feline Punishment

Punishment is the application of a stimulus that decreases the chance that a behavior will be repeated. It must coincide with the undesirable behavior and must be unpleasant enough to deter the cat from repeating that behavior. Keep in mind that you are punishing the behavior not the cat. Punishment should never be considered unless the pet has the means to satisfy its nature and its needs. For example, the scratching cat should be provided with an appropriate scratching post before any attempts to punish undesirable scratching is initiated.

What is the best way to physically discipline my cat?

One of the most frequently utilized and least successful forms of punishment is a direct swat or hit. Hitting a cat can lead to hand-shyness, fear of the owner, and potential injury for both the owner and the cat. The cat will continue to perform the undesirable behavior in your absence since it learns that it can perform the behavior without punishment when you are out of sight. Physical punishment is therefore ineffective, potentially dangerous, and totally unnecessary.

How can I punish my cat for rough play?

Perhaps the only place where interactive punishment might be successful is for the cat that swats or scratches the owners in play. Even here, species appropriate punishment such as “hissing” or the use of a punishment device is better than using any physical techniques. Before punishment is considered however, the cat must be given ample opportunity to play appropriately. Toys that can be chased, swatted, and batted should be provided. Realize that if you give any form of attention (including physical punishment) to a cat that is swatting, or attacking in play, the behavior may actually be rewarded and further encouraged.

CONTROLLING UNDESIRABLE BEHAVIOR IN CATS: THE ROLE OF PUNISHMENT



Whenever the cat begins to swat or play attack, immediately stop the play by walking away or by using some non physical form of punishment such as a water sprayer, can of compressed air, hand held alarm or perhaps a loud hiss. **Under no circumstances should a cat ever be punished unless it is caught in the act of performing the behavior.** Remember, physical punishment should never be used as it is generally ineffective and could cause harm to your relationship with your cat, or to the cat itself.

How can I punish my cat for other behaviors?

The key to successful punishment is to associate an unpleasant consequence with the undesirable behavior. However, unless the owner remains out of sight while administering punishment the cat may learn to cease the behavior only when you are present. Punishing the cat remotely, while you remain out of sight, is an effective means of deterring undesirable behavior. It takes a great deal of preparation, time and forethought. Another effective means of punishment is to booby-trap an area, so that the cat learns to “stay away.”

How does remote punishment work?

For remote techniques to be successful there are two key elements. First, you must monitor the cat while out of sight so that you know when the problem begins. The second element is that the punishment must be delivered while the inappropriate behavior is occurring (while you remain out of sight).

- 1) Keep a close watch on the problem area while hidden around a corner, in a nearby closet, or behind a piece of furniture. You can also monitor your cat using a video camera, intercom, or a motion detector (such as the Tattle Tale monitor™, which makes a loud beep whenever it is disturbed).
- 2) As soon as the cat enters the area or begins to perform the undesirable behavior (climb, scratch), use a spray bottle, noise device such as a remote control device to chase the cat away.
- 3) If the cat cannot determine where the noise or water is coming from, it should quickly learn to stay away from the area whether the owner is present or not.

BOARDING SERVICES



We would love to care for your special friend while you are away. It is our commitment to provide your pet with excellent care.

All animals boarding at our facility will receive meals that are aligned with our veterinary nutritional recommendations. Fresh water will be available at all times and we will be happy to accommodate any special diet arrangements.

If your pet is extremely active, you may wish to add playtime, which offers individualized exercise and play.

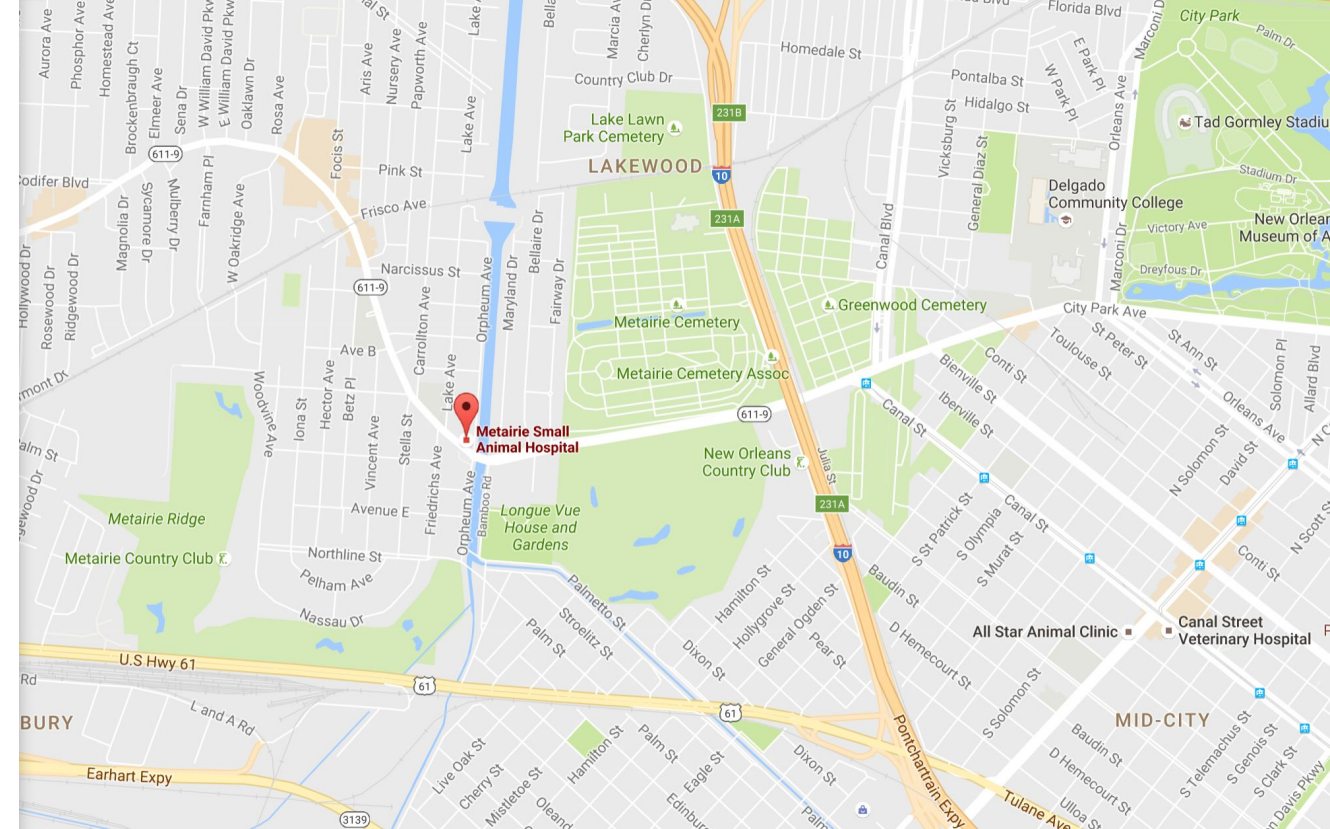
Warm cozy bedding is provided for each boarder. Because we provide all the comforts of home (well almost!) you do not need to bring any blankets or bedding for your pet.

Please call our offices to discuss boarding fees and get your questions answered.

We are here for you!

In general, you know your pet well. You know when things are not normal. Be aware that these subtle signs can be signs of more serious illness. Our pets rely on us to be aware of their general health and take care of their health needs by bringing them to the veterinarian.

Semi annual exams allow the best opportunity for you to partner with your veterinarian to provide optimal care for your pet. It is during these visits that your veterinarian can assess weight, nutrition, exercise, dental health, metabolic health and overall good health. During these visits, you and your veterinarian can discuss any concerns and make plans for optimal health.



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