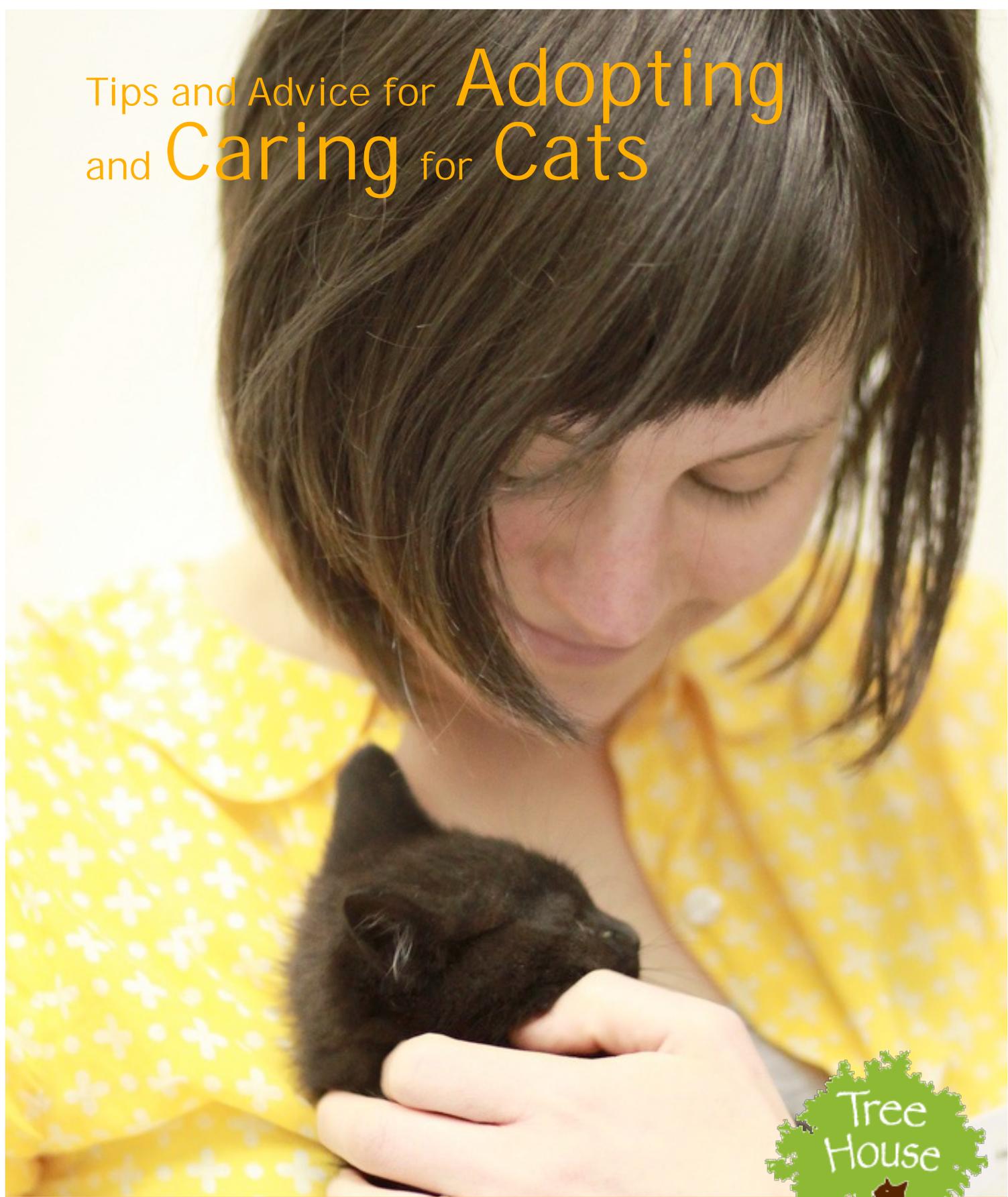
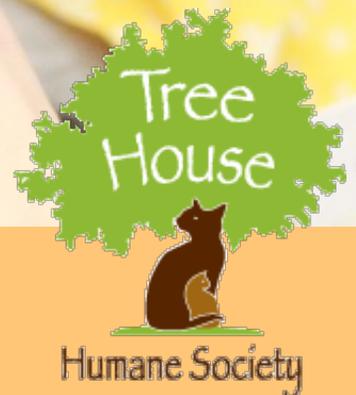


Tips and Advice for Adopting and Caring for Cats



Produced for Chicago Animal Care and Control
by Tree House Humane Society



Tips and Advice for Adopting and Caring for Cats



CONTENTS

Brief History of the Cat	1
Adopting the Right Cat for You	2
Introducing a New Cat to Resident Cats	4
Introducing a New Cat to a Resident Dog.....	5
The World According to Your Cat.....	6
Changing Your Cat's Behavior.....	8
Overstimulation in Cats.....	10
Aggression in Cats	11
Aggression Between Cats.....	12
Guidelines to Integrating Your Shy Cat	13
Litterbox 101.....	14
Top 10 Reasons to See Your Vet.....	16

Advisor: Steve Dale **Veterinary Advisors:** Dr. Colleen Currigan, Dr. Lynda Ewald

Contributors: Kate Boisseau, Ollie Davidson, Dave de Funiak, Richard Glasser, Joan Levergood and Jenny Schlueter

Photography: Alan Chan, Susie Inverso and Kady Walker

© 2013 by Tree House Humane Society

produced by Tree House Humane Society - www.treehouseanimals.org



A Brief History of the Cat



Egyptians are believed to be the first people to have domesticated cats more than 4,000 years ago. Cats became invaluable to the Egyptians due to the felines' incomparable ability to exterminate mice and other rodents, thereby protecting food stores. Cats became so useful that the Egyptians came to regard cats as sacred feline deities, and killing a cat became a crime punishable by death. After death, cats were treated to the same burial rites as people: they were mummified and buried, often in enormous tombs with thousands of other cats.

The Egyptian cat was a large desert cat known today by the scientific name *Felis ijbicia*. The Egyptian cat was eventually brought to Europe by merchant traders,

who used the cats as mousers on ships and ultimately sold them. Cats became further domesticated in Europe and eventually found their way to America. The scientific name for today's housecat is *Felis domesticus*. So, although modern housecats and their Egyptian predecessors share a family tree, they reside on distinct genetic branches. The domestic cat is literally a breed apart from its wild ancestors.

Despite the rift between your housecat and its ancestors, today's domesticated cat is still influenced by the same instinctive behavior that enabled the wild Egyptian cat to survive. Instinctive behavior is the result of millions of years of evolutionary fine-tuning, and you can see evidence of that

fine-tuning each time you witness your cat hunting a laser pointer or leaping to the top branch of a cat tree. In fact, knowing the instinctive drive behind many of your cat's behaviors will help you better understand and ultimately care for your cat.

In the pages that follow, you will find information on everything from diet to litter box problems to shy cats. Interestingly, so much of the information on the need for wet food diets or correct litter box placement is derived from knowledge of a cat's natural instincts. Although domesticated cats no longer roam the African savannah or hunt in the desert, knowing that their ancestors did is the key to unlocking many of the mysteries of feline behavior.

Adopting the Right Cat for You

Sharing your life with an animal can be a wonderful, rewarding experience, but having a pet is not for everyone. Before bringing a cat home, consider whether or not you're ready for the commitment of caring for an animal. Ask yourself the following questions: Are you willing to commit to caring for a cat for the entirety of her lifetime, which could be as long as twenty years? If you move, marry or have a child, will you keep your cat? Do you have time to spend with a cat? Are you financially prepared to care for a cat? The average annual cost for general cat care is

and approximately \$1,000 could be more should your cat require

emergency veterinary care, preventive dental care or treatment for chronic issues. Remember that all cats require a commitment of time, money, and energy. If you're unable to take on the responsibilities of caring for and supporting a cat, you should probably reconsider adopting.

If you do decide you are ready to bring an animal into your life and family, it is important that you choose your companion carefully. Please consider adopting a homeless cat or kitten from your local humane society or animal shelter. With millions of healthy, adoptable animals euthanized in shelters each year, purchasing an animal from a breeder or store is unnecessary. Contrary to what some may believe, shelter cats are likely to be just as healthy, or healthier, than purebred or store bought cats. Also, by adopting a shelter cat, you will be helping to cut down animal overpopulation, and you will be giving a second chance to a cat in need.

Cat or kitten? Many people arrive at shelters wanting to adopt a cute, playful kitten, and though kittens can make great companions, they often require more time and patience than older cats. It is important that you consider your lifestyle before adopting a kitten. If you're going to be a one-pet family, reconsider adopting a kitten. Kittens need constant stimulation, and a single, bored kitten will often entertain herself by scratching furniture, digging in or eating plants, or climbing curtains.

This behavior is not only destructive but can be dangerous as well. Rather than inflicting twice the damage, two kittens usually take their energy out on each other, thus saving your belongings. You also should reconsider adopting a kitten if you have young children. Young animals and children are usually a dangerous combination. Neither children nor kittens know how to behave appropriately with one another — kittens don't yet know not to climb up legs or bite fingers, and children don't yet know their own strength when they're playing with pets. Older, calmer cats are generally a better match for children. If your schedule already is packed and you have little time to spend at home with a pet, you should not adopt a kitten. If you do not have several hours a day to devote to a kitten, your friendly, affectionate kitten may grow up to become a shy, distant cat who recognizes you only as a food source. Consider adopting an older cat if a kitten does not fit your lifestyle.

Is a special-needs cat right for you?

Shelters throughout the country are filled with loving, wonderful cats who just need a little extra care. If you have the time and money to devote to one of these special-needs cats, consider adopting a cat who is older, feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) positive, or suffering from a nonlife threatening condition, such as deafness, blindness, etc. Special-needs cats are often known to develop incredibly strong bonds with their adoptive families.



Preparing to adopt Before visiting your local shelter, be sure to call or visit its website to familiarize yourself with the adoption procedures. Some shelters may require proof of address, references or a copy of your rental lease to prove that pets are allowed in the building. Also, keep in mind that all members of the household should be included in the adoption process—adopting a pet is a life-long commitment and these important decisions need to be mutually agreed upon. Now you're ready to adopt. Congratulations on bringing home a new family member!

Bringing a new cat home Here are a few things you should know to ensure the experience goes as smoothly as possible. First, prepare your house for the new arrival. Remove toxic plants (for a complete list of poisonous plants, visit treehouseanimals.org); put away small objects which may be ingested by your new cat (yarn, paper clips, rubber

bands, etc.); put away any breakables, so there's no chance that your new cat might knock them off shelves or tables; and close all cabinets and closets where your cat might hide.

Next, set up a single room as a home base for your cat. Cats are territorial animals, and for a new cat, too large a territory can be overwhelming. By keeping your new cat in a small area you will be providing a less stressful introduction to your home. For most cats a bathroom or a bedroom is an ideal location to get accustomed to the home.

Remind everyone to make the initial homecoming peaceful and quiet, without excited squeals and hugs. The secret to success is to allow your new friend to come to you. It is important not to force affection upon your new cat; soft talk and treats can be more reassuring in the early stages than petting. When your new cat seems comfortable with you being in the

room, hold out your hand, palm down in a relaxed manner, and let her smell you. If your cat backs away, you have gotten too close. If your cat approaches, hold your position and continue to speak softly. At this point, begin petting your new cat by softly stroking the top of your cat's head and cheeks, and slowly work down the cat's body, if she allows it.

Once your cat is thoroughly at ease with you, begin to allow her to explore the rest of the house. The first few times your cat is allowed to roam, supervise the exploration. This will prevent her from finding a hiding place. When your new cat has explored her new environment and seems comfortable, position food, water and the litter box(es) in their permanent places. Be sure to show the cat where you have moved them.

Be patient. Remember that each step must be taken at your cat's pace.



Introducing a new Cat to Resident Cats

As described in Adopting the Right Cat for You, set up a room as a home base for your new cat—this will allow for a gradual introduction to the family.

For the first 72 hours, do nothing. It is important to allow your new cat to become accustomed to her surroundings. Your new cat is not only acclimating to home base, she also is using her fine-tuned senses to discover what is beyond the closed door of her home base, including resident cats. After 72 hours, begin introducing the cats to each others' scents. First, leave a blanket or towel in the home base for the new cat and another on your resident cat's favorite sleeping spot. After they each have spent time sleeping on the blanket or towel, exchange the linens. This scent introduction will help your cats get used to each other and will help improve the eventual face-to-face meeting.

While the cats are becoming used to each others' scents, create positive experiences for them while they are still safely separated. Feed the cats on either side of the closed home base door. Get a feather toy and encourage play under the door. By creating positive experiences, you send the message that another cat is a good, fun friend to have in the house.

After a week of allowing your new cat to acclimate to home base, it is time to switch the cats' living areas. Let your new cat explore the rest of the house while your resident cat stays in home base. Be sure to not let the cats meet while you are swapping rooms. After a

few hours of exploration, you can return the cats to their original spaces.

After about two weeks, it is time to start introducing the cats. Clip both cats' nails to lessen the chance of injury. Place a treat (a plate of wet food or some kind of natural cat treat) outside of the home base door and place another treat down the hall from the door, but still in sight of home base. Lure your resident cat to the treat down the hall, and while she is enjoying the treat, open the door to home base and allow the new cat to enjoy her treat. By allowing the cats to see each other while enjoying good food, you are helping them associate rewards with the other cat. After they have finished their treat, place the new cat back in home base. The next day, repeat the above step, but this time place the plates a couple of feet closer together. Continue this process until the cats get close enough to meet face-to-face. It is important not to interfere

when they meet. It is normal for cats to hiss, howl, posture, and swat when they first meet. In the unlikely event that they do begin to fight, do not pick up either cat. Put a towel or blanket between them to block their view of each other and try to corral one to a safe place. You will need to spend more time creating positive experiences before introducing them face-to-face again. After the cats have spent time together without conflict, gradually increase the amount of time the cats are out together. After they have spent several hours harmoniously sharing the same territory, several times in a row, you can leave them alone together.

Remember to be patient as the process of introducing cats can take time, but in most cases, cats will learn to coexist peacefully. And in many cases, cats can become life-long friends.



Introducing a new Cat to a Resident Dog

Once your adopted cat has acclimated to her new home (see the Bringing Home a New Cat article), she's ready to meet the resident dog. As with any introduction (house, people, resident cat), the meeting process should be done slowly, calmly, and with lots of positive reinforcement.

To prepare for the initial meeting, make sure your dog is calm (you might want to consider exercising the dog thoroughly to tire him out). Next crate the dog, then bring the cat into the room and place her on a table where she can see the dog (if your cat is nervous or does not like to be held, then place her in a carrier). Give both the cat and dog treats while they watch one another. If either the cat or dog seems nervous or uncomfortable with this first meeting, then repeat this step as necessary before proceeding to the next part of the introduction.

For the next meeting, place the cat up on a table and give her lots of treats. Next, place the (calm) dog on a leash and bring him into the room with the cat. Ask the dog to sit and give both animals treats. If the cat and dog are comfortable and not hissing or barking, then move the dog closer and give more treats. If the cat seems nervous by the proximity of the dog, ask the dog to lie down to make the cat feel more secure. Continue bringing the dog closer to the cat as long as both remain calm. Once the dog is within a few feet of the cat, allow them to remain at this distance while giving them treats and praise.

Continue with these controlled visits as long as necessary; be sure to keep the visits short and as calm as possible. When the animals begin to relax while in each

other's company, you can start to increase the amount of time they spend together. But be sure to still keep the dog on a leash. These visits should continue until both animals seem comfortable with one another.

Once both cat and dog are behaving themselves, you can begin the next phase of the introduction process—leaving the dog off-leash while with the cat. To prepare for this meeting, it is important that you provide your cat with an escape route should she feel it necessary to get away from the dog. A high cat tree or cabinet will allow your cat to jump up to a safe area. If you don't have these available, baby gates also work well—these allow your cat freedom while confining the dog to a specific area of the house. It is essential that you supervise these off-leash visits and quickly correct any chasing, stalking, or intimidating behavior using voice commands or timeouts (you can read more about how to effectively use timeouts in the article, Changing Your Cat's Behavior). If problems arise that cannot be corrected quickly and easily, then separate the animals and back up a step to crate or leash controlled meetings.

After you have had several off-leash meetings free of incidents and you feel comfortable with the relationship, you can begin leaving the animals out together unsupervised. Again, it is important that before you do this, you make sure that your cat has an escape route should she need to get away from the dog. Start with very short unsupervised visits then gradually increase the time they spend together until they no longer need to be separated.

Most often animals can learn to live together in peace, but it may take time for this harmony to be established. If you're patient and you don't rush the process, then chances are you will be successful in integrating your household.

However, it is possible that things won't work out. Sometimes, despite our best efforts, cats and dogs do not get along, and this can be a dangerous (and potentially fatal) situation. If you find that the animals are continually exhibiting aggressive and/or predatory behaviors during the introduction process, then it's possible that you will be unable to integrate the two. If you have the space and time (it is important that neither animal be neglected) to allow the cat and dog to live in separate rooms in the house, then you could consider keeping both animals. If this is not possible, it is in the best interest of the animals that you find one of them another home. Consider having a trusted friend or family member adopt one of the animals. Or, if this is not an option, you can return the animal to the shelter where you adopted him/her, so that the animal can find a more suitable home.

When your cat is the aggressor

Usually, the assumption is that the dog will intimidate or harass the cat, but the reverse can be true as well! During the meeting phase, make sure the cat is not stalking or swatting at the dog. Continual intimidation on the part of the cat can eventually cause the dog to become aggressive. If you witness the cat harassing the dog, use time outs to correct the behavior.

The World According to Your Cat

Your cat hears, sees, smells, tastes, and feels the world differently than you do (and processes it all through a very different brain), so it should be no surprise that there are often miscommunications between humans and cats! To understand and to ultimately change your cat's behavior, it is essential that you understand how your cat interprets the world.

Hearing Although not as good at detecting lower pitches, cats can pick up sounds so faint or high-pitched they are out of the range of human hearing. Sound is an important part of the cat's world for both surviving and communicating. Listen to how many different sounds your cat makes—this is your cat communicating in an undeniably complex language. Because your cat hears high-pitched sounds better than you, it is important that you be aware of noise levels in your home, particularly if your cat is timid or easily upset by commotion. Are you playing music loudly or using the vacuum cleaner? If your cat is reacting to these sounds, it is best to create a quiet, calm room for your cat to stay in while you are cleaning or entertaining guests.

Smell The wet, pebbly patch of skin on your cat's nose is called a rhinarium. It can catch and hold scent molecules, and it gives your cat a superior sense of smell. In fact, smell is so important to a cat's survival that they have a secondary olfactory organ. On the roof of a cat's mouth behind the front teeth is the vomeronasal organ, which you can see when your cat yawns. When confronted with an especially interesting or unusual smell, a cat will drop its jaw open and let

the scent waft across the vomeronasal organ in a behavior called the Flehmen response.

In addition, because scent is vital to cats, they will mark just about anything. For cats, scent is a means of communication. Try this experiment yourself: present your cat with a new object and observe his reaction. Most likely, your cat will smell the object. If it looks interesting (and inedible and nonthreatening), the cat will butt the object with his head and rub the side of his face (and sometimes his whole body) against the object. Your cat has just claimed the new object by marking it with pheromones. Cats have scent glands on the sides of their faces and in other places along their bodies and tails. In the wild, scenting is the way cats communicate with other cats. When your cat weaves around your legs or ankles, he is showing love by depositing his unique scent and claiming you as his own!

Scenting and marking territory with urine is another way cats communicate "owned" property. For cats who are domesticated and reside in a house,



spraying urine can create considerable problems within the household. For more information on understanding spraying and modifying the behavior, turn to the Litter Box 101 article.

Scratching Scratching is an instinctive behavior that has many practical purposes, such as scenting, stretching and exercising, and keeping nails in good condition. Cats scratch for multiple reasons, and although this behavior is useful and necessary for both the mental and physical health of your cat, the behavior often can be at odds with a guardian's desire to keep furniture intact and pristine. Luckily, there are many ways to keep cats from scratching inappropriate surfaces. Read more about the importance of scratching and painless, easy alternatives to declawing in the article Why Cats Need Their Claws on our website.

Touch Cats have a very keen and sophisticated sense of touch; they have millions of touch receptors all over their bodies. These receptors are most numerous in the face (nose, whiskers) and feet (paw/paw pad) areas. The whiskers of a cat are extremely sensitive to touch and are important in helping the cat to feel for prey while he is hunting or navigating around dark areas and through narrow passages (the whiskers will tell the cat if he can fit into a small passage way or between two objects). The touch receptors in the paw pads are also adapted for hunting and are valuable in helping a cat to determine the type of prey (even in the dark) and if the prey is still alive. Paw pads and nose touch receptors are also very sensitive to temperature.

Taste Since taste is related to smell, and cats have a superior sense of smell, their sense of taste is exceptional, too. However, this does not necessarily mean your cat has what we might consider good taste. Cats will put things in their mouths that we find disgusting or unclean. This is part curiosity and part necessity, as the only way for cats to carry something is in their mouths.

When it comes to food, cats have different likes and dislikes. It is important for you to discover what type of food is appealing to your cat to ensure he eats well. It is also important, however, for you to be aware of what diet is healthiest for your cat. Sometimes the food your cat wants to eat is not always the healthiest option—just like children, cats often prefer “junk food” to healthy, nutritionally complete foods. For more information on this topic, please read the article Feline Diet and Nutrition found on our website.

Vision Contrary to popular belief, cats cannot see in total darkness. Mammals need some light to see; however, cats are very well equipped to see in minimal light. Unlike our pupils, which expand and contract as a circle, cats’ pupils begin as tiny vertical slits that can open to include the entire iris, the colored portion of the eye. The tapetum is a reflective layer of cells at the back of the eye that bounces even the faintest light back through the light-sensitive cells. Have you ever noticed your cat’s eyes glowing at night? The glowing is actually light reflected off the tapetum. This reflective feature enhances a cat’s ability to best utilize low amounts of light, a trait all nocturnal animals need to survive.

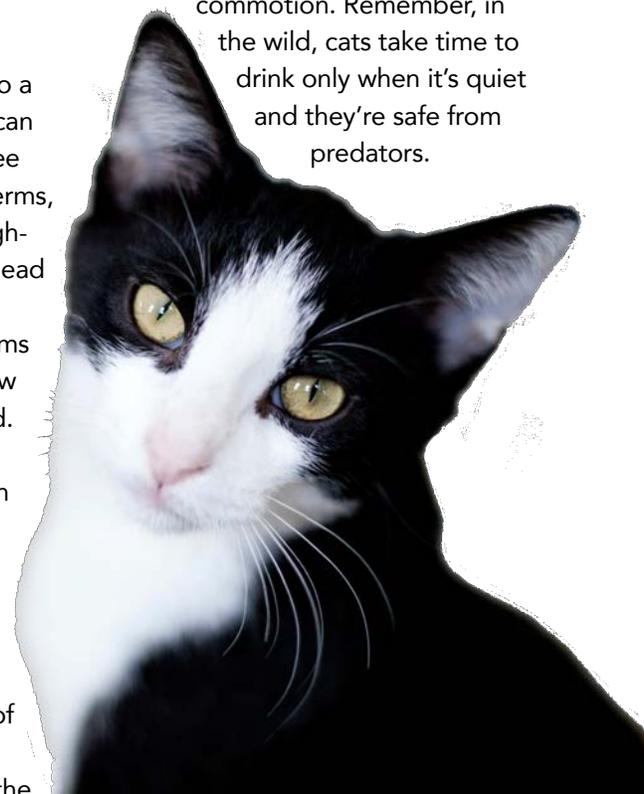
Nocturnal instincts Cats are naturally nocturnal (most active at night) and crepuscular (most active at dawn and dusk) animals. If we consider that the domesticated cat’s ancestors came from the plains and deserts of Africa, the modern cat’s midnight antics make perfect sense. Temperatures rise dramatically during the day on the African grasslands. To survive the heat, animals find shade and sit still. A smart predator (which the cat most certainly is) won’t waste energy searching out hiding places of prey and chasing down game while the sun is up. At sunset, the temperature drops and darkness hides movement. This is the ideal time to come out to find food and water, and it is precisely the time when the ancestors of your cat went on the prowl. So your cat’s noisy charging around at 3:00 a.m. isn’t necessarily a “behavior problem”—it’s an instinct! For more information on how to combat nocturnal “behavior problems,” read Changing Your Cat’s Behavior.

Climbing and leaping Any horizontal surface is an invitation to a cat. A young and determined cat can leap almost straight up two or three times his body length. In human terms, that would mean being able to high-jump about 12-to-18 feet from a dead start. Cats also will fearlessly jump several feet across horizontal chasms and “tight-rope” walk along narrow passages many feet off the ground. Cats also like to “roost” in high places—atop the refrigerator or on the top shelf of the closet. This desire to climb and sleep in high places is a survival instinct passed on from their wild ancestors. In the wild, cats have to follow prey up cliff faces and along the limbs of trees. In addition, cats in the wild have to hide from predators, and the

best place to hide is up high where nothing can sneak up behind them. These survival instincts are alive and well in even the laziest domesticated house cat!

Aversion to drinking water

Many domesticated cats live day-to-day being slightly dehydrated. This is due, in part, to their desert ancestry, when they were engineered to survive without access to regular water sources. Domesticated cats sometimes require encouragement to drink. Try including moisture-rich wet food in your cat’s diet. It is also important to have more than one water bowl and to place these bowls throughout the house. Sometimes cats are more inclined to drink from water bowls that are in a different location than their food bowls. You can also invest in water fountains, as many cats prefer to drink from running-water sources. Also, be sure to place your cat’s water bowls in safe, quiet areas away from dogs, young children, or general household commotion. Remember, in the wild, cats take time to drink only when it’s quiet and they’re safe from predators.



Changing Your Cat's Behavior

Many people believe that cats are too independent or apathetic to respond to people's attempts to modify their behavior. But the failures people have experienced when attempting to alter their cat's behavior are not the fault of the cat. Rather, they are misunderstandings between humans and felines. The motivations behind cat behavior are complicated and deep-seated, but with creative thinking, flexibility, and patience, you can correct unwanted behavior in your feline companions.



Be patient There are often multiple reasons for some behaviors, like litter box problems or aggression among cats. Discovering the reasons for the undesired behavior and finding solutions to the problem may take weeks or months. But don't worry; most problems can be solved!

Medical problems and behavior

Oftentimes, your cat's behavior problems are her way of communicating to you that she is experiencing a serious health issue. Any sudden change in your cat's behavior that does not resolve itself quickly after an obvious cause (like last week's visit by your sister and her brood of unruly kids) should be considered a potential medical problem, and your cat should be checked by your veterinarian. For example, sudden, unexplained aggression toward people may not be a behavior issue; it may be a serious neurological problem.

Keep in mind that even behavior problems that reveal themselves more slowly also can be the result of a medical issue. For example, your older cat may become less tolerant of the other cats in your household because of a serious health concern, such as kidney disease. Your older cat may not want to appear weak in front of your other cats, so instead of playing and cuddling as she once did, your older cat becomes aggressive towards her feline roommates.

Additionally, behavior issues also can become medical problems. A cat who is fearful of another cat in the household may be too afraid to come out to eat and drink or may not feel safe going into the litter box. Not eating or drinking enough, or holding her bladder for long periods of time, can quickly become a medical problem.

Once you take your cat to a veterinarian and can rule out a medical condition, you can begin working with your cat to eliminate undesired behaviors. Here are some tips to get you started.

Four Easy Rules of Cat Training

1. Understanding the behavior

Instincts A cat's basic instincts for safety or play often are at the root of common behavior problems. For example, the need for safety when using the litter box is often at odds with where we would like to keep the litter box. The instinct to hunt and play hunt often is the motivation behind your cat attacking your legs while you sleep. And the fear of potential predators or the instinct to protect her territory from other cats may trigger an indoor cat to spray near the door after sensing another cat outside.

Individual personality Every cat has a different personality which may have been defined by life experience, genetic makeup, or a combination of the two. Some cats are constantly on your lap and demanding your attention, some are content simply being near you, and some are fearful of people. There are also alpha female cats whose job it is to keep other cats in line, and who sometimes hiss, yell, or swat at their feline roommates. All of the aforementioned are examples of normal cat personalities. What you might consider a behavior problem may simply be the personality of your cat.

Territory and changes Cats are territorial animals. They spend a great deal of time marking and defining the space that belongs to them, and most cats are not comfortable with change to, or within, their territory. If something new and possibly frightening comes into your cat's territory, such as a new feline roommate or a construction project, your cat may perceive the territory as unsafe and retreat to a spot under the bed or couch. This is a common response to change.

2. Offer another option

Now that you know why your cat is behaving in a certain way, you can begin working to change that behavior. You can manage your cat's natural instincts and her impact on your home by providing acceptable options to meet your cat's needs. If your cat is attacking your legs while you sleep, try engaging her in a long play session before you go to bed, so she receives the play-hunting session she needs, and is tired enough to sleep through the night. Or you might consider adding another cat to your household, so the two cats can tire each other out during the day, leaving you able to sleep at night. If your cat reacts negatively to change, you can help her by introducing

change more slowly to reduce the cat's stress levels. For information on how to correct problems with improper elimination, please see Litter Box 101. For information on how to deter your cat from scratching furniture, please see Why Cats Need Their Claws on our website.

3. Remove the cause of the problem

Punishing your cat will only teach her to fear you. Also, punishing your cat can exacerbate problems and can make an anxious cat even more anxious. The easiest way to manage a behavior problem is to eliminate whatever is causing the problem. If your cat licks or chews plastic bags from the grocery store, be sure to keep them in a place where the cat cannot reach them. If you have a cat who chews on cords, you should keep cords hidden, or coat them with liquid dish soap to discourage chewing.

4. Ignore unwanted behavior and encourage desired behavior

It's easy to react to unwanted behavior by yelling or chasing your cat away from the couch she is scratching or the plant she is chewing. But, this reaction actually can be just the attention your cat is seeking, and by yelling or chasing, you have just unknowingly encouraged the behavior you are trying so hard to deter. Instead of reacting to the scratching or biting, ignore the behavior completely. When your cat receives no response from you, she will eventually move on to a more interesting activity (like napping or eating). You also can encourage good behavior. When your cat uses the scratching post or lies near a cat companion she previously disliked, be sure to give her treats or pets or engage her in play. By associating food, affection, and play with good behavior, you are ensuring that your cat will

repeat the desired behavior. Consistently ignoring unwanted behavior while encouraging desired behavior will bring about long-term change in your cat!



Timeouts and how to use them

Timeouts are very useful for managing a variety of feline behavior issues, including play aggression and intercat aggression. Timeouts are used to eliminate the reward for an unwanted behavior (such as the reaction from a fearful cat or your own reaction of yelling and chasing, which your cat could perceive as great fun) and to give the cat time to forget about the activity in which she was participating. The cat will spend 20 minutes to 30 minutes in a room by herself, without the opportunity to continue the behavior. The key to correctly using timeouts is to corral or place the cat into the quiet timeout room, while giving the cat minimal attention. Do not chase the cat to give her a timeout. Chasing the cat may turn out to be even more fun for the cat than the original behavior, so you may inadvertently encourage the unwanted behavior. Do not play, pet, or talk to the cat when putting her in timeout. This attention could be viewed as a reward. After 20 minutes in the timeout room, release the cat. If she goes right back to the unwanted behavior, promptly return the cat to the timeout room. Consistent use of timeouts will help eliminate many types of behaviors.

Overstimulation



Overstimulation is the swatting or biting behavior that cats exhibit in response to too much petting. Oftentimes, cats who are easily overstimulated are friendly cats who will seek attention from people, but then strike out after a short period of petting. The cause of overstimulation is not known, but there are ways to reduce the incidences of biting and swatting.

Know the signs of overstimulation

Most cats will give you signals that they are becoming overstimulated. The signals may be very subtle or more obvious, depending on the cat. Warning signs that your cat may no longer want to be petted are: flicking or swishing of the tail, ears rotating to the side or back, staring, fur rippling on the back or sides, or tensing of the body. Again, the signals may be subtle, so it is important that you pay close attention to your cat as you pet her and be aware of her body language.

Less is more The best way to reduce incidences of overstimulation is to stop petting your cat before she gets to the point of reacting to the touch. As soon as you see signs that your cat is beginning to dislike the attention, stop petting her. This does not mean that you have to leave the room or ignore the cat; you simply have to refrain from touching her. Most cats will remain happily on your lap or by your side even though you are no longer

petting them. If you are able to consistently read your cat's body language and stop petting her before she acts out, you can eventually reduce or even stop the overstimulation altogether.

Although most cats will alert you to their imminent biting or swatting, not all cats exhibit warning signs. If your cat becomes overstimulated without warning, then it is important that you pay close attention to time when you're interacting with her. Watch the clock as you pet your cat. If your cat only tolerates three minutes of petting, then be sure to stop petting after one or two minutes. If your cat is completely unpredictable, then it is best (for your own safety) to use a wooden back scratcher (or similar tool) to pet her, so that if your cat strikes out, you will not be injured. But be sure not to overpet her even though you're not at risk of being hurt. It is still important to time these sessions so that you stop petting on a positive note. The positive notes will hopefully add up to your cat reacting well to petting in the future.



Inform houseguests Even if you are used to and comfortable with your cat's overstimulation, don't expect your houseguests to feel the same way. Tell visitors not to pet the cat, and explain the cat's situation. If guests accidentally reach for or stroke the cat, don't be afraid to remind them not to touch her. If the cat jumps in the lap of a houseguest, allow her to remain as long as the visitor is comfortable with her being there. To remove the cat, ask your guest to stand up slowly, and the cat will jump off. It is important never to pick up an overstimulated cat as her aggression will most likely increase with the added contact.

Other alternatives If, despite your best efforts, the cat continues to swat and bite when petted, you have other options. Ask your veterinarian about possible medications to help with the behavior, which might improve your cat's tolerance for affection. Another option is learning to simply enjoy your cat's company without petting her. Sometimes, we have to just accept our cats' personalities and learn to love them for who they are. If they enjoy being on your lap or next to you but without petting, it still makes for good company!

Aggression in Cats

Is it really “aggression?” If your cat lunges at your ankles when you walk by, it might be aggression. But, more likely, it’s play.

The well-fed housecat is an unmotivated and clumsy hunter. However, your cat still has the skills and instincts of a born predator. This shows up as play – stalking, pouncing, chasing anything that moves, and ambushing you or other companion animals are all feline ways of having a good time.

However, the effect of playful “aggression” can be just as damaging and painful as the real thing! Shape your cat’s play to appropriate toys or another cat.

Solo cats get pretty bored during the day and are often more likely to play rough with you (or your furniture, drapes, etc). A second cat is often the cure. When that is not an option, routine long play sessions with interactive toys are crucial.

Finally, be sure your not sending a mixed message. If you use your bare hands to play with a kitten, don’t be surprised if that cat chomps and scratches you happily as an adult. After all, you taught Kitty that human flesh is an appropriate toy! Even if you don’t mind some scratches and nips, your friends and family probably will – it’s better to make human flesh “off-limits” for your cat’s teeth and nails.

Fearful Aggression Any cat will fight being restrained. Any injured or frightened animal will bite or scratch.

Any animal startled out of a sound sleep may attack the first thing to come into view. Most animals become possessive of food, toys, sleeping spaces, and other resources and may defend them aggressively.

Cats also are notoriously poor at adjusting to change. We know of cats who became irritable and went off their food after something as simple as rearranging the furniture! The point is, any change can make your cat jumpy- and more likely to bite or scratch.

Even though they have the instincts of predators, cats don’t go looking for trouble. If startled, they generally make a hasty retreat. However, if a cat is confronted with a sudden danger and it’s too late to escape, that cat may attack with or without warning.

Real Aggression For no particular reason, your cat just up and bites you. Was it a play nip? Was it for attention? Did you startle the cat? Could something else have startled the cat (including sounds that may be beyond your range of hearing)?

The demeanor of the cat at the time of the bite is important, too. Was the tail lashing? Ears laid back? Did the cat growl, snarl, or hiss first? Did the cat give you a “hard stare?” These could indicate a

genuinely aggressive bite.

“Real” aggression often has a physical basis. Your cat should be thoroughly examined by a veterinarian, possibly including a blood chemistry screen. Kidney, liver, urinary tract, or other problems may be the reason for your cat’s unpredictable behavior. Watch for other neurological signs such as sudden clumsiness in walking, twitches, head tilts, and noticeable differences in the size of the cat’s pupils.

Safety First Wash cat bites and scratches thoroughly with hot water and soap (preferably a disinfectant soap or Betadine surgical scrub). Keep cat bite wounds open so they heal from the bottom up- they get infected easily. It’s advisable to get medical attention for cat bites.

Of course, we believe the best place for your housecat is your house. However, if your cat does go outside, bites or scratches carry a risk of rabies. Your cat should be seen by your veterinarian within 24 hours after biting, kept indoors for the next 10 days, and examined again on the tenth day. In many areas, this is the law.



Aggression Between Cats

Are you sure it's aggression?

Most cats like to rough-house. They chase each other, pounce, bite, wrestle, and tumble across the floor. There may be some vocalizing.

Unless one or both cats are screaming and snarling loudly, you're probably witnessing play. The cat's facial expressions are a tip off too.

Introducing a new cat Expect some hissing and swatting. Give a new arrival his or her own room for at least a few days. This allows the resident cat(s) to hear and smell the newcomer without having the challenge of meeting face to face. Introduce the new cat slowly, and only



The Alpha Female Cat Among spayed and neutered cats there are some females that are dominant by nature- these are the alpha females. In a multiple cat household, there is often a female at the top of the cat hierarchy. This cat has a lot of responsibility- it is her job to keep all of the other cats in line. She can't seem to find much time to play because of this responsibility. She can't change this; it is just her personality.

under supervision. Be certain to reassure the resident cat(s) as much as possible. Eventually, things will settle down. Usually the "worst case scenario" is that the cats appear to more or less ignore one another. The initial adjustment period can be anywhere from a day or two to three months or more, so you'll need patience.

Cats that used to get along If you already live in a multiple cat household, you may have had this happen to you- two cats that used to tolerate each other suddenly hiss and yowl almost constantly.

If the problem persists for a few days without any sign of improvement, the next step is a trip to the veterinarian. There are many types of health problems that can make a cat more irritable. Illness can also subtly alter the cat's behavior and scent- something we miss, but that bothers another cat.

Assuming everything checks out okay at the veterinarian's office, take a close look at your household. Have there been any changes? Cats don't take change very well. A different schedule, the addition or absence of a family member, different

An alpha female must keep her place at the top of the hierarchy at all times. Sometimes it is necessary for her to howl, yell and hiss at one of the other resident cats for no apparent reason, just to let them know who's boss. Often the other cats will need to be whacked on the head a few times to remind them who is in charge of the cat family. It is very important that she should get the first plate for food at eating time, as top cat she is entitled to

food, even redecorating can be enough to put a Tabby on the defensive.

If there's no clear explanation for the sudden aggression, you may have to reintroduce the cats. Wipe both cats down with a wash cloth and distilled water, then follow the steps for introducing a new cat.

Fighters and Biters A truly aggressive cat is rare. Some cats are quick on the defensive and will scratch and/or bite without warning if provoked even a little.

The overwhelming majority of these incidents are misunderstandings – the cat does not want to be touched; the cat does not want to be picked up; the cat was startled by a sudden movement or sound.

An unneutered male cat will fight with other cats and be more aggressive towards humans. Neutering and spaying are an absolute requirement to control any aggressive behavior.

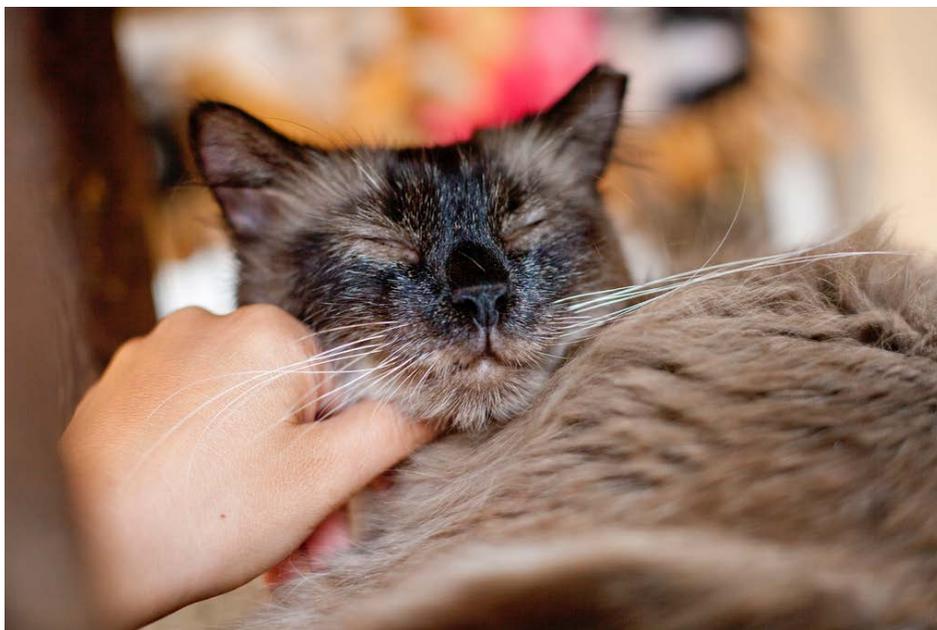
If your cat continues to show genuine aggression toward other cats, you probably have a "one-cat household" cat. However, schedule a visit to the vet to make sure there's no physical problem.

eat first. Alpha female cats are happiest as the only cat in a household, or where other resident cats have mellow personalities. The majority are best suited to live with mellow male cats. Alpha females are also more likely to get over stimulated when petted.

So let the alpha female cat just be herself, after all she is in charge of everything and that is a big responsibility.

Guidelines

for Integrating a Shy Cat



In the beginning stages of socialization leave your cat wanting more, and end each session on a positive note, such as leaving a treat for the cat.

Step 3 Schedule at least two 15 to 20 minute socialization sessions with you cat each day. Play is also a confidence builder for shy cats- it will give them more confidence and lessen their fear. A "Cat Dancer" toy is an excellent way to get your cat absorbed in play. Some shy cats may be afraid of the toy; so watch the cat's reaction to each new element you introduce.

In order to integrate your new cat into your home you need to be committed to helping your cat get comfortable with both you and it's new environment. Cats in general will eventually get accustomed to their physical environment and those who live with them, however, a shy cat will usually hide when first introduced to a new environment.

Step 1 Set up a single room as a "home base" for you cat. Because cats are territorial animals, too large a territory can be overwhelming it is just too much responsibility. By keeping the cat in a small area you will be providing a less stressful introduction to your home. For most cats a bathroom or a bedroom would be appreciated. Set up your new cat's food, water and litterbox in the home base area, and to ensure they do not find a hiding spot you cannot get to

them, block off trouble areas, like under the bed.

Step 2 Introduce yourself slowly. Quietly, slowly and gently approach your new cat. Don't try to touch the cat right away. Just spending some quiet time with your cat will allow it to get used to you and learn that you are not scary. Talk quietly to the cat. Soft talk and tasty treats can be more reassuring in the early stages than petting. When he or she seems to be comfortable with you just being in the room, you can hold out your hand palm down in a relaxed manner and let him or her smell you. If at any point your cat backs away, you have gotten too close. If your cat approaches, hold your position and continue to speak softly. Begin by softly stroking the top of your cat's head and cheeks. You will be able to tell if your cat wants you to go further.

Step 4 Once your shy cat is thoroughly at ease with you, begin to allow him or her to explore. The first few times your cat is allowed to roam the entire house should be under your direct supervision. This will prevent him or her from finding a hiding place that you can't find. It is possible that your cat will hide or exhibit shy behavior when other people come into your home even after becoming comfortable with you. This may also be the case if you move or rearrange your furniture.

Be patient and respect your cat's individuality. Remember that each step must be taken at your cats own pace. The time and effort you put into socialization is rewarded tenfold with the love and companionship of a friend for life.

Litterbox 101



Litter box issues are a common problem, and they are the number one reason why guardians relinquish their cats to shelters. Although litter box issues can be very frustrating, they usually can be solved if you are patient and willing to explore the problem and the various possible solutions.

Medical problems and inappropriate elimination The first thing to consider when confronted with a litter box issue is whether your cat is trying to communicate physical discomfort. Urinary tract problems (including cystitis, kidney infection, urinary bladder stones, etc.), diabetes, arthritis, and bowel issues are some of the more common medical explanations for litter box problems. Any time a cat begins urinating outside of the litter box, she should be seen by a veterinarian for a physical examination and to rule out medical causes for the change in behavior. Even if there is a logical explanation for the cat not using the box (such as a new animal in the

home), there is a possibility that lack of access to the box has caused the cat to hold her urine, which can cause a urinary tract infection. Problems can occur the other way around as well. A cat with a painful, untreated urinary tract infection can begin to associate the pain of urination with the litter box, creating a possible future behavior problem in addition to the existing medical problem. Urinary tract problems do not always show up on the first test, so work closely with your veterinarian when your cat has urinated outside of the box.

Good litter, maintenance, and number of boxes If your cat defecates or urinates directly next to the litter box, this could be a sign that the litter box is too dirty or your cat finds the litter unappealing. It is important that a cat's litter box be kept clean. Cats will instinctively avoid eliminating in an area that has too many feces or too much urine. This aversion to dirty boxes is derived from your cat's natural survival instinct. In the wild, predators seek out

prey by tracking urine and feces. A dirty box is a red flag for your cat; it says that predators will soon find her and attack! By scooping the box daily, you ensure that your cat feels comfortable and safe using it. Also, every few weeks litter boxes should be washed with mild soap and rinsed out. Don't use detergent that is too harsh, as the odor can be off-putting to your cat. A good litter box has about two inches of unscented litter in it. There are a variety of litters available, from clay to crystals to natural, biodegradable matter. Sometimes the solution to a litter box problem is as simple as choosing a new litter. Trial and error is the best way to find a litter that your cat likes.

The number of litter boxes in your home can make a difference as well. The optimum number of boxes is one more than the number of cats in the household. Some cats prefer to urinate in one box and defecate in another, so even if you have only one cat, it may be essential for you to have two litter boxes.

Type of litter box Sometimes the solution to a litter box problem is the type of litter box you're using. If you have a covered litter box and your cat is hesitant to walk inside it, try removing the cover. Alternatively, your cat might prefer a covered litter box, so if you are using an uncovered box, try replacing it with a covered one. Sometimes, especially with senior cats and kittens, it is difficult for a cat to step over a high-sided box. If you notice your cat is having difficulty getting into the box, purchase a box with lower sides, a cut-out entrance, or a ramp. The size of the box is also important. Bigger cats may be hesitant to use a smaller box where they are less able to move around. Experimentation is the best way to find the box that best suits your cat. And remember, if you have more than one cat, it may be best to have a couple of different types of litter boxes to suit each of your cats' needs.

Safety instincts and litter box location Location is one of the most common reasons cats avoid using their litter boxes. Cats feel vulnerable to attack from predators when they eliminate, so instinct tells cats to choose a place to eliminate where they are able to see clearly and escape if a predator should appear. If your cat is not using the litter box, consider its location.

Putting the box out of sight or far away from where the cat spends most of her time are common practices in many homes, but doing so can create an issue for cats who feel vulnerable when they use the litter box. Small bathrooms, closets, basements, pantries, and laundry rooms are all small spaces where a cat can feel trapped, and none are ideal litter box locations. A great location for a litter box is in a fairly quiet room within the part of the home where your cat spends most of her time. Place

the box along the wall opposite the door to the room, and make sure there is no furniture blocking the view of the door. This open, safe spot is ideal for a litter box.

If you live in a multilevel home, keep a litter box on each level. If a cat has to make a trip up or downstairs to use the box, there is a greater chance that she will simply urinate or defecate in an area that doesn't require as much travel, especially as she ages.

Clean up accidents right away The obvious reason you want to clean up urine and feces is the smell. The smell is unpleasant to people, but another reason to clean up messes right away is that cats are attracted back to areas where they or other cats have urinated. Enzymatic cleaners (available at most pet supply stores) are essential. Wipe up as much urine as you can, and pour (don't just spray) enzymatic cleaner on the urine stains. After two weeks, if you can still smell the urine, soak the area again. Upholstered furniture and carpet can be cleaned using a carpet cleaning machine (available for rental at most hardware stores). Use a mixture of cold water and enzymatic cleaner. Be sure to turn off the heating element (heat will kill the enzymes) and repeatedly go over the spot with the cleaning mixture until you have removed as much of the urine as possible. Completely rinse with cool water. Enzymatic cleaners can also be used in washing machines for urine-soaked clothes or other machine washable items.

Territory marking Spraying is a way for cats to mark their territory. Intact (unneutered) males are the biggest culprits, as they spray to claim territory over competing males. But spraying also can be a way for female or

neutered male cats to mark their territory if they perceive a threat within their home or space. Urine sprayed on vertical surfaces is always considered urine marking, but both male and female cats also can mark with urine on horizontal surfaces. Horizontal urine marking is often near a door with access to the outside or an area of the home which houses another animal.

Since cats mark territory in ways other than spraying, a good solution to spraying is to encourage your cat to mark her territory in another way, such as scratching. Place a scratching post or mat near the areas your cat frequently sprays. If marking seems to be triggered by seeing other cats outdoors, cover windows and glass doors, so that your cat can't see outside. You can also try Feliway spray or diffuser. Feliway is a synthetic cat-cheek pheromone, that can be used to encourage a cat to rub her cheeks instead of marking with urine.

A note about kittens Very young kittens may not be able to make it to the litter box before urinating or defecating. To prevent accidents while your kitten's bladder is still developing, it is best to confine young kittens to a small area of your home and to have a litter box nearby. Once your kittens are a little older, they can have the run of the house without your having to worry about accidents. Also, although most kittens will instinctually use a litter box, it is a good idea to encourage and reward litter box use through positive reinforcement. When your young kitten successfully uses the litter box, reward the behavior with petting, treats, and kind words. A kitten who associates rewards with the litter box is more likely to continue appropriate litter box use throughout the entirety of her life.

Top Ten Reasons to See Your Vet

There is a common misconception that cats can “take care of themselves.”

Consequently, they are taken to the veterinarian far less frequently than dogs, statistically about half as often. Like all companion animals, though, cats require ongoing veterinary care to live happy, healthy lives. Regular checkups are even more critical for cats because they instinctively hide signs of illness. This behavior, developed in the wild to disguise cats’ weaknesses from predators, serves little purpose for domesticated cats. In fact, subtle signs of illness in cats often are overlooked or mistaken for behavior problems, which is why it is extremely important to bring your cat to the veterinarian for regular checkups and when you notice even slight changes in behavior.

If you do not already have a veterinarian, talk to friends and relatives, or contact your local humane society for a referral. In some cases, it may be advantageous to see a veterinarian at a feline-only hospital or a veterinarian at a mixed (dog/cat) practice who has a special interest in feline medicine. Members of the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) can be found at catvets.com. Also, just as there are board certified specialists in veterinary cardiology and oncology, there are specialists in feline medicine who are certified by the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners (ABVP). Names of veterinarians boarded in feline medicine can be found at abvp.com or catvets.com.

Visit the clinic or hospital you are considering and ask questions about the facility, including available services, hours, etc. Make sure you’re comfortable with the environment, as well as the professionalism and friendliness of the doctors and staff.

Schedule an appointment for a checkup. Make sure you like the way the veterinarian communicates with you and handles your cat. If you don’t, then continue trying new veterinarians or clinics until you find a place you like. It’s best to establish a good relationship with a veterinarian before an emergency arises. If the clinic you choose doesn’t have emergency services, find out where the nearest emergency veterinary clinic is located or where your veterinary hospital refers patients after hours.

Below is a list of changes that may signal that your cat is not feeling well. These are only guidelines and are not by themselves definitively diagnostic for a specific condition. Rather, they indicate that a veterinary visit may be needed. You know your cat’s habits and behavior better than anyone. Do not ignore changes that may indicate a developing health issue. If there is a sudden change in behavior, see your veterinarian as soon as possible.

*** NOTE:** Even if your cat shows none of these signs, consider scheduling wellness examinations every six months. Diagnosing disease early can be the key to successful treatment and may be less costly in the long run. Often, by the time cats display an illness, the disease has progressed significantly, necessitating more extensive and costly treatment.

The “Subtle Signs of Sickness,” written by Fort Dodge Animal Health and the AAFP and adapted by Tree House, include:

Inappropriate elimination This is one of the most common reasons given for relinquishing cats to shelters. Guardians often assume that the problem is behavioral, so they don’t seek medical help. When a cat begins to urinate or defecate outside the

litter box, medical conditions must be ruled out before behavioral intervention is attempted. Any cat that does not feel well for any reason may behave differently, and in cats, that behavior may include eliminating outside the litter box. Defecation outside the box can be a sign of inflammatory bowel disease, constipation, arthritis, or other medical conditions. Cats may urinate outside the box because of Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease (FLUTD), kidney disease, Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome (kitty Alzheimer’s), hyperthyroidism, diabetes, etc. The urinary tract also can become blocked by crystals, stones, or mucous plugs. This is a medical emergency, especially in male cats, who are more prone to urinary tract blockages because of the anatomy of their urinary tracts. These cats can quickly become sick and die as toxins that normally are eliminated via the urinary tract instead build up in their bloodstream. Signs of blockage include straining in or out of the box but only producing a small amount of urine or none at all, frequent trips to the box, and/or vocalizing while attempting to urinate.

Once medical problems have effectively been eliminated, or while they are being resolved, you can address litter box problems associated with behavior. For more information on litter box problems, see Litter Box 101.

Changes in interaction A cat who suddenly has little desire for attention from his human family may not be feeling well. For a normally docile cat, general irritability or aggression towards people or other animals can be a sign of pain. Having regular playtime and routines for interacting with your cat will help you notice sudden behavioral changes.

Changes in activity Decreased physical activity can be caused by medical conditions that result in pain, discomfort, or lack of energy. As cats age, they can develop arthritis and other illnesses that may cause them to be less active or playful. However, not all cats slow down in old age. Some older cats can experience increased physical activity, which can be a sign of hyperthyroidism.

Changes in sleeping habits Knowing your cat's daily habits will help you determine if there is a significant change in his normal sleep pattern. On average, cats can spend 16 to 18 hours daily sleeping. Daytime rest generally consists of several catnaps. These naps aren't typically deep sleeps, so cats usually can be roused by normal household sounds and other stimuli, such as light petting or food. If a cat is sleeping more often and/or more deeply than usual or has difficulty lying down and getting up, it could signal an underlying problem.

Changes in food/water consumption Most cats eat well and regularly, provided they are offered food they enjoy. Get to know your cat's eating and drinking habits; they are valuable indicators of the cat's overall health. Increased food consumption can point to problems such as diabetes or hyperthyroidism. Increased water consumption can indicate kidney disease, diabetes, hyperthyroidism, or other conditions. Many diseases can cause cats to decrease their food intake or stop eating altogether, which can lead to rapid, even dangerous, weight loss. A cat who has not eaten at all for more than a day is at potential risk of developing serious liver problems. Meal feeding your cat is preferable to free feeding, in part because if your cat's eating patterns change you will notice it right away.

Unexplained weight loss or gain Cats can gain or lose weight even when

they continue to eat normally, and such instances point toward one or more underlying health problems, such as hyperthyroidism. Obesity is a significant health issue. Studies indicate that 50 percent or more of indoor cats are overweight, which can lead to or be a complicating factor in a long list of medical and behavior problems, including diabetes, heart disease, and joint problems, as well as an overall reduced quality of life. Cats should be weighed regularly to determine if they are maintaining their ideal weight. This can be done at home with a scale designed for weighing cats (pediatric human scales or any scale that weighs to the ounce will work well) or at regular veterinary visits. Weight checks are another good reason for semiannual exams. It may not be apparent that your cat has lost weight, but even the slightest weight loss can be cause for concern. For example, a 12-pound cat losing 3 pounds may not seem significant, but this is akin to a 160-pound person shedding 40 pounds. If such weight loss was not planned and/or happened too quickly, it could indicate an underlying medical cause.

Changes in grooming Cats are generally meticulous groomers and maintain their coats in a healthy and lustrous condition, free of mats. Areas of fur loss or an unkempt appearance can be signs of disease. Overweight and/or arthritic cats may have trouble grooming their hindquarters and may need help keeping those areas clean. Anxiety and depression can cause cats to groom improperly as well, but as always, it is best to rule out physical causes first. Excessive grooming might indicate allergies or skin irritation. If your cat is over-grooming certain areas, look at the skin in those areas to see if there are any abnormalities. Also, keep in mind that even indoor cats can become infested with fleas, and flea allergies can cause over-grooming.

Signs of stress Stress (as experienced by the cat) can result from good or bad events. A situation that a cat perceives as stressful

may or may not be seen the same way by his human family. Any change within a household can potentially be a source of stress to the family cat, so changes should be made slowly and carefully. At times of stress, cats may hide, become depressed, and eat more or less than usual. Because these same signs can be indicators of medical problems, and because stress can also prompt the onset of disease, cats should visit the veterinarian when they show these signs. It is also important to recognize that chronic or long-term boredom can be a stressful situation for cats, just as in people. As discussed above, stress can lead to depression along with a host of other health and quality-of-life issues. Cats like to play and be mentally challenged just as we do. Your cat will benefit from daily interactive play to keep him active and stimulated.

Changes in vocalization Increased vocalization or howling tends to be more common in older cats, and it can signal an underlying medical condition such as hyperthyroidism. Pain also can cause cats to be more vocal, so schedule a veterinary visit if your quiet cat suddenly develops inexplicable howling behavior. In elderly cats, howling may be a sign of hearing loss or feline cognitive syndrome, the latter of which may be helped by medication.

Bad breath Bad breath can be caused by conditions such as kidney failure or diabetes, but it is most often an indicator of poor dental health. Dental disease is common in cats; some sources suggest that 70 percent have gum disease as early as age three. You may be able to see tartar on your cat's teeth, but the majority of dental problems in cats involve pathology that is below the gum line. Cats should have their teeth examined at least annually. Home tooth brushing in conjunction with regular veterinary dental care can prevent bad breath, painful teeth and gums, tooth loss, and spread of infection to other organs.



www.TreeHouseAnimals.org

Tips and Advice for Adopting and Caring for Cats

produced for Chicago Animal Care and Control by Tree House Humane Society

Mission, Values and Vision

Tree House is a humane organization that promotes the inherent value of every animal and strives to educate the public about proper and responsible animal care, with a focus on the care and placement of stray cats with special physical and emotional needs. We are committed to finding every healthy and treatable animal a home and to helping lead the way to a No-Kill nation.

Since our founding in 1971, we have found homes for more than 16,000 cats. At any given time, we have more than 200 cats available for adoption at our two Chicago shelters. Tree House is unique for many reasons, but one of the most important is that we make it a priority to take in cats who are suffering from severe illnesses or injuries. We focus on these types of cats because most other shelters don't have the resources to care for them.

Tree House is planning to design and build a state-of-the-art, environmentally-friendly Adoption and Education Center and low-cost Veterinary Clinic in Chicago. This building will be the largest cat-only facility in the country. The project will be completed in two separate phases. Phase one will involve the construction of the Adoption Center, which will be approximately 15,000 square feet, will house between 250 - 300 cats and will feature an in house veterinary clinic, which will be open to the public. Phase two will involve the construction of a low-cost Veterinary Clinic, open to the public, with a focus on providing quality veterinary care to low-income pet guardians. Our focus will remain on rescuing and rehabilitating sick and injured stray cats, educating the public in responsible cat and dog care and behavior, and providing guidance and direct support for the care of feral cat colonies living outside.