

Common Health and Behavioral Issues of Cats

INTER-CAT AGGRESSION

Unlike dogs and humans, cats are solitary creatures and don't naturally seek to be part of a group. For this reason, it is common to see inter-cat aggression in a multi-pet household. This aggression can be very obvious (hissing/growling at each other, fighting, etc.) or it can manifest itself in subtler ways (urine marking).

INAPPROPRIATE URINATION

This is one of the most common behavioral issues of cats. However, accidents outside the litter box can also be caused by a medical issue, so booking an appointment with your veterinarian as soon as you notice your cat is urinating around the house is needed to rule out things like a urinary tract infection, stones in the bladder, etc. For your appointment, be ready to tell your veterinarian how the urine looks: has it been sprayed up against a vertical surface like a wall or furniture, or is it more like a puddle on a flat surface like the floor or a bed? Vertical spraying is likely to be a marking behavior, while a puddle has more of a potential to be a medical issue.

If your cat seems healthy, the issue is likely behavioral. Different factors that can cause a cat to mark include but aren't limited to:

- **Lifestyle changes.** Ex: moving into a new home, welcoming a new baby, adding a new pet, hosting relatives during the holidays, etc.
- **Litterbox issues.** Ex: Using a litter substance your cat doesn't like, not cleaning the box often enough, the box is in a bad place (too public or too closed off and makes them feel trapped), not enough boxes for all the cats in the house, etc.

- **Inter-cat aggression.** When cats don't get along, they sometimes resort to spraying around the house either out of stress or as a desire to state their dominance, and sometimes the aggressor will sit where the litterbox is and attack the other cats when they try to use it (this is why it is important to have multiple different boxes in different locations around the house).
- **Intact adults.** Marking can also be a sexual behavior, which is significantly less likely to affect cats that are spayed or neutered.

SCRATCHING

It is a natural behavior of cats to scratch their claws. While you may be tempted to consider declawing, this procedure can cause many life-long health issues and many veterinarians refuse to perform the surgery. In order to maximize your chances of preventing unwanted scratching, it is important to always provide an appropriate place for your cat to scratch their claws, such as scratch posts. It is also important to figure out what material your cat most enjoys scratching on, as these cat scratch items come in cardboard, carpet, wood, and many more. You can then use things like catnip or Feliway, a synthetic cat hormone, to attract your cat to this surface, and things like citrus sprays on the items you want to discourage scratching.



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URINARY BLOCKAGE

Cats naturally have urine that is quite concentrated, and they enjoy fresh clean water which means they are picky and don't drink as readily as dogs. Both these factors combined make it so that crystals and bladder stones are more likely to occur, and in the male cat especially, the urinary passage is narrow enough that it can be blocked by crystals and stones.

Signs and symptoms include frequent visits to the litterbox, straining/crying out in pain while trying to urinate, blood in the urine, small amounts or no urine at all in the litterbox, and pain in the abdomen. If you suspect your cat is blocked it needs to see a veterinarian immediately as this is a medical emergency. If the blockage isn't removed, the bladder can rupture and toxins can build in the blood stream, both of which lead to death. This is not a condition that can resolve on its own – the blockage will need to be physically removed and your cat may need to stay in the hospital for care following this procedure.

There are several steps you can take to decrease the chances of this happening to your cat.

- **Feeding a urinary food.** Many veterinary diets carry food that is specially formulated to decrease the risk of urinary blocks by making the urine hostile to the formation of crystals and by making your cat thirstier, encouraging them to drink more.
- **Feeding canned food.** While kibble is more cost friendly and has certain benefits such as keeping the teeth clean, canned food is an excellent way to dilute your cat's urine as it has a much higher moisture content than kibble. You can feed your cat strictly canned food or you can feed a meal of canned food once a day. You can also mix some water into canned food to make it soupier to add even more fluids into their diet.

- **Using water fountains.** Pet stores carry water dispensers in which the water is circulated, passed through a filter and pumped out in gentle streams from a spout, which keeps the water clean and fresh at all times. This water can be more enticing to your cat than water that sits unmoving in a water dish, which in turn encourages them to drink more.

HAIRBALLS

It is a well-known fact that cats are very good at grooming themselves, so finding vomited hairballs around the house can seem normal. However, a healthy cat's digestive system is supposed to be able to digest fur that is ingested during grooming and expel it. If your cat has regular hairballs it could mean they have digestive disorders, like irritable bowel disease for example.

