



Cat Behavior Pamphlet Table of Contents

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Understanding Your Kitten's Behavior and Development

THE APPLE DOESN'T FALL FAR FROM THE TREE, especially for cats. The fact is, well-socialized cats are more likely to have well-socialized kittens. Kittens often mirror their mothers' calm or fearful attitudes toward people; this is a normal part of their socialization. But you can play a vital role, too, by petting, talking, and playing with kitty to help her develop good "people skills."

Kittens are usually weaned at six to seven weeks, but may continue to suckle for comfort as their mother gradually leaves them for longer periods of time. Orphaned kittens, or those weaned too soon, are more likely to exhibit inappropriate suckling behaviors later in life, such as sucking on blankets, pillows, or your arm. Ideally, kittens should stay with their littermates (or other "role-model" cats) for at least 12 weeks.

Kittens orphaned or separated from their mothers or littermates too early often fail to develop appropriate social skills, such as learning how to send and receive signals, what an "inhibited bite" (acceptable mouthing pressure) means, how far to go in play-wrestling, and so forth. Play is important for kittens because it increases their physical coordination and social skills and helps in learning limits. By interacting with their mothers and littermates, kittens explore the ranking process ("who's in charge") and also learn how to be a cat.

Kittens who are gently handled by people 15–40 minutes a day during the first seven weeks are more likely to develop larger brains. They're more exploratory, more playful, and better learners. Skills not acquired during the first eight weeks may be lost forever. While these stages are important and fairly consistent, a cat's

mind remains receptive to new experiences and lessons well beyond kittenhood. Most cats are still kittens, in mind and body, through the first two years of life.

Stages of Kitten Development:

0–2 Weeks: Neonatal Period

- Kitten learns to orient toward sound.
- Eyes begin opening; they are usually open by two weeks of age.
- Competition for rank and territory begins. Separation from mother and littermates at this point can lead to poor learning skills and aggression toward people and other pets.

2–7 Weeks: Socialization Period

- By the third week, sense of smell is well-developed and kitten can see well enough to find her mother.
- By the fourth week, sense of smell is fully mature and sense of hearing is well-developed. Kitten starts to interact with littermates and can walk fairly well. Teeth start to come in.

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- By the fifth week, eyesight is fully mature, and kitten can right herself, run, place her feet precisely, avoid obstacles, stalk and pounce, and catch “prey” with her eyes.
- Kitten starts to groom herself and others.
- By the sixth and seventh weeks, kitten begins to develop adult sleeping patterns, motor skills, and social interaction abilities.

7–14 Weeks: Most Active Play Period

- Social and object play increases kitten’s physical coordination and social skills. Most learning is by observation, preferably of kitten’s mother.
- Social play includes belly-ups, hugging, ambushing, and licking.
- Object play includes scooping, tossing, pawing, mouthing, and holding.
- Combined social/object play includes tail chasing, pouncing, leaping, and dancing.

3–6 Months: Ranking Period

- Kitten is most influenced by her “litter,” which may now include playmates of other species.
- Kitten begins to see and use ranking (dominance or submission) within household, including humans.

6–18 Months: Adolescence

- Kitten increases exploration of dominance, including challenging humans.
- If not spayed or neutered, kitten experiences beginnings of sexual behavior. (Spaying or neutering your kitten at an early age will increase the health benefits of the surgery and increase her lifespan.)

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Managing Your Kitten's Rough Play

IF **PLAYING WITH YOUR KITTEN** evolves from peek-a-boo to professional wrestling in a matter of seconds, follow these tips to keep playtime interesting and reduce the number of trips to the first-aid kit. Cats incorporate a variety of behaviors into their play, such as exploratory, investigative, and predatory behaviors—skills they would normally need for survival. As you've probably already learned, kittens like to explore new areas and investigate anything that moves, and may bat at, pounce on, and bite objects that resemble prey. It's not always easy for cats to draw the line between acceptable play and overly aggressive behavior, so play-motivated, aggressive behaviors are common in young, active cats less than two years of age and in cats who live in one-cat households.

Kittens learn how to inhibit their bite from their littermates and their mother. A kitten who is separated from her family too early may play more roughly than a kitten who has had more valuable family time. In addition, if humans play with a young kitten using their hands or feet instead of toys, the kitten is liable to learn that rough play with people is okay. In most cases, it's not too difficult to teach your kitten or young adult cat that rough play isn't acceptable. Here are some tips.

Encourage Acceptable Behavior

Redirect your kitten's aggressive behavior onto acceptable objects like toys. Drag a toy along the floor to encourage your kitten to pounce on it, or throw a toy away from your kitten to give her even more exercise chasing the toy down. Some kittens will even bring the toy back to be thrown again. You can also try toys that your kitten can wrestle with, like a soft stuffed animal that's about her size, so she can grab it with both front feet, bite it, and kick it with her back feet. This is one of the ways kittens play with each other, especially when they're young. It's also one of the ways they try to play with human feet and hands, so it's important to provide

this type of alternative play target. Encourage play with a "wrestling toy" by rubbing it against your kitten's belly when she wants to play roughly—and be sure to get your hand out of the way as soon as she accepts the toy.

Since kittens need a lot of playtime, try to set up three or four consistent times during the day to initiate play with your kitten. This will help her understand that she doesn't have to be the one to initiate play by pouncing on you.

Discourage Unacceptable Behavior

You need to set the rules for your kitten's behavior, and every person your cat comes in contact with should reinforce these rules. Your kitten can't be expected to learn that it's okay to play rough with Dad, but not with the baby.

Use aversives to discourage your kitten from nipping. You can either use a squirt bottle filled with water and a small amount of vinegar, or a can of pressurized air to squirt your kitten when she starts getting too rough. To use this technique effectively, you'll need to have the spray bottle or can handy at all times—it's absolutely essential to use the aversive while the rough behavior is occurring. So

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either place a spray bottle in each room, or carry one with you as you move around the house. In some cases, you may want to apply taste aversives to your hands. If you have sensitive skin, you can wear gloves and put the aversive on the gloves. The possible disadvantage to this method is that your kitten may learn that hands with gloves taste bad and those without gloves don't. Remember that aversives will work only if you offer your kitten acceptable alternatives.

Redirect the behavior after using the aversive. After you startle your kitten with the aversive, immediately offer her a toy to wrestle with or chase. This will encourage her to direct her rough play onto a toy instead of a person. We recommend keeping a stash of toys hidden in each room specifically for this purpose.

Withdraw attention when your kitten starts to play too roughly. If the distraction and redirection techniques don't seem to be working, the most drastic thing you can do to discourage your cat from rough play is to withdraw all attention. She wants to play with you, so if you keep this limit consistent, she'll eventually figure out how far she can go. The best way to withdraw your attention is to walk to another room and close the door long enough for her to calm down. If you pick her up to put her in another room, then you're rewarding her by touching her, so you should always be the one to leave the room.

Please Note: None of these methods will be very effective unless you also give your kitten acceptable outlets for her energy—by playing with her regularly using appropriate toys.

What NOT to Do

Attempts to tap, flick, or hit your kitten for rough play are almost guaranteed to backfire. Your kitten could become afraid of your hands, or she could interpret those flicks as playful moves by you and play even more roughly as a result. Picking up your kitten to put her into a "timeout" may reinforce her behavior because she probably enjoys the physical contact of being picked up. By the time you get her to the timeout room and close the door, she may have already forgotten what she did to be put in that situation.

A Note about Aggression: Don't encourage your playful kitten to bite or scratch any parts of your body. Instead, provide appropriate toys for her to bite and scratch. If she continues to bite or scratch you, call your veterinarian, animal shelter, or an animal-behavior specialist for humane suggestions on how to redirect her behavior to appropriate objects. Also, be sure to thoroughly clean all bites and scratches and apply an antibiotic ointment. If you receive a bad bite, you should seek medical attention immediately.

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- Using Aversives to Modify Your Cat's Behavior

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Introducing Your New Cat to Your Other Pets

WOULDN'T IT BE NICE if all it took to introduce a new cat to your resident pet were a brief handshake and a couple of “HELLO, My Name Is...” name-tags? Unfortunately, it’s not quite that simple, which means you’ll need to have some realistic expectations from the outset.

What are realistic expectations? First, it’s recognizing and accepting that your pets may never be best buddies but will usually come to at least tolerate each other. Second, it’s understanding the need to move slowly during the introduction process to increase your chances for success.

Some cats are more social than other cats. For example, an eight-year-old cat who has never been around other animals may never learn to share her territory (and her people) with other pets in the household. But an eight-week-old kitten separated from her mom and littermates for the first time might be glad to have a cat or dog companion.

Cats are territorial, and they need to be introduced to other animals very slowly so they can get used to each other before a face-to-face confrontation. Slow introductions help prevent fearful and aggressive problems from developing. Here are guidelines to help make the introductions go smoothly.

Confinement

Confine your new cat to one medium-sized room with her litter box, food, water, and a bed. Feed your resident pets and the newcomer on each side of the door to this room, so that they associate something enjoyable (eating!) with each other’s smells. Gradually move the dishes closer to the door until your pets can eat calmly while standing directly on either side of the door.

The Old Switcheroo

Swap the sleeping blankets or beds used by all the cats so they each have a chance to become accustomed to the other cats’ scents. You can even rub a towel on one animal and put it underneath the food dish of another animal.

Once your new cat is using her litter box and eating regularly while confined, let her have free time in the house while confining your other animals to the new cat’s room. This switch provides another way for the animals to experience each other’s scents without a face-to-face meeting. It also allows the newcomer to become familiar with her new surroundings without being frightened by the other animals.

Next, after the animals have been returned to their original designated parts of the house, use two doorstops to prop open the dividing door just enough to allow the animals to see each other, and repeat the whole process over a period of days—supervised, of course.

Slow and Steady Wins the Race

It’s better to introduce your pets to each other gradually so that neither animal becomes afraid or aggressive. You can expect a mild protest from either cat from time to time, but don’t allow these behaviors to intensify. If either animal becomes fearful or aggressive, separate them, and start the introduction process once again with a series of very small, gradual steps, as outlined above.

Note: When you introduce pets to each other, one of them may send “play” signals which can be misinterpreted by the other pet as signs of aggression. If that’s the case, always handle the situation as “aggression” and seek professional help from a veterinarian or animal behaviorist right away.

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Precautionary Measures

Try to keep your resident pets' schedules close to what they were before the newcomer's arrival. Before bringing a new pet home, check with your veterinarian to be sure all your current pets are healthy. You'll also want to have at least one litter box per cat in separate locations. Make sure that none of the cats are being "ambushed" by another while trying to use the litter box, and be sure each cat has a safe hiding place.

If small spats (hissing, growling, or posturing) do occur between your cats, you shouldn't attempt to intervene directly to separate the cats. Instead, make a loud noise, throw a pillow, or use a squirt bottle with water and vinegar to separate the cats. Give them a chance to calm down before reintroducing them to each other.

Cat-to-Dog Introductions

You'll need to be even more careful when introducing a dog and a cat to one another. A dog can seriously injure and even kill a cat very easily, even if they're only playing—all it takes is one quick shake to break the cat's neck. Some dogs have such a high prey drive that they should never be left alone with a cat. Dogs usually want to chase and play with cats, and cats usually become afraid and defensive. In addition to using the techniques described above to begin introducing your new cat to your resident dog, take these steps:

Practice Obedience

If your dog doesn't already know the commands "sit," "down," "come," and "stay," begin working on them right away. Small pieces of food will increase your dog's motivation to perform, which will be necessary in the presence of a strong distraction such as a new cat. Even if your dog already knows these commands, work to reinforce these commands in return for a tidbit.

Set Up Controlled Meetings

After your new cat and resident dog have become comfortable eating on opposite sides of the door and have been exposed to each other's scents as described above, you can attempt a face-to-face introduction in a controlled manner. Put your dog's leash on and have him either sit or lie down and stay for treats. Have a second person offer your cat some special pieces of food. At first, the cat and the dog should be on opposite sides of the room. Lots of short visits are better than a few long visits. Don't drag out the visit so long that the dog becomes uncontrollable. Repeat this step several times until both the cat and dog are tolerating each other's presence without fear, aggression, or other undesirable behavior.

Let Your Cat Go

Next, allow your cat some freedom to explore your dog at her own pace, with the dog still on-leash and in a "down-

stay." Meanwhile, keep giving your dog treats and praise for his calm behavior. If your dog gets up from his "stay" position, he should be repositioned with a treat lure and praised and rewarded for obeying the "stay" command. If your cat runs away or becomes aggressive, you're progressing too fast. Go back to the previous introduction steps.

Use Positive Reinforcement

Although your dog must be taught that chasing or being rough with your cat is unacceptable behavior, he must also be taught what is appropriate and be rewarded for those behaviors, such as sitting, coming when called, or lying down in return for a treat. If your dog is always punished when your cat is around and never has "good things" happen in the cat's presence, your dog may redirect aggression toward the cat.

Directly Supervise All Interactions Between Your Dog and Cat

You may want to keep your dog at your side and on-leash whenever your cat is free in the house during the introduction process. Be sure that your cat has an escape route and a place to hide. And until you're certain your cat will be safe, be sure to keep the two separated when you aren't home.

Kittens and Puppies

Because they're so much smaller, kittens are in more danger of being injured or killed by a young energetic dog or by a predatory dog. A kitten will need to be kept separate from an especially energetic dog until she is fully grown, except for periods of supervised interaction to enable the animals to get to know each other.

Even after the cat is fully grown, she may not be able to be safely left alone with the dog. Usually, a well-socialized cat will be able to keep a puppy in his place, but some cats don't have enough confidence to do this. If you have an especially shy cat, you might need to keep her separated from your puppy until he matures enough to have more self-control.

When to Get Help

If introductions don't go smoothly, seek professional advice immediately from a veterinarian or animal-behavior specialist. Animals can be severely injured in fights, and the longer the problem continues, the harder it can be to resolve. Punishment won't work and could make things worse. Luckily, most conflicts between pets in the same family can often be resolved with professional guidance.

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Introducing Your New Cat to the Litter Box

MOST OF US KNOW CATS are finicky eaters, but they can also be pretty picky when it comes to the other end of the digestive process—making use of a litter box. Fortunately, the following suggestions should keep your cat from “thinking outside the box.”

Location, Location, Location

Most people are inclined to place the litter box in an out-of-the-way spot to minimize odor and prevent cat litter from being tracked throughout the house. But if the litter box ends up in the basement—next to an appliance or on a cold cement floor—your cat may be less than pleased for a number of reasons.

A kitten or an older cat may not be able to get down a long flight of stairs in time to get to the litter box. If the litter box is located in an area that she seldom frequents, she may not even remember where it is, especially during the first few weeks she’s welcomed into your home. If a furnace, washing machine, or dryer suddenly comes on and startles your cat while she’s using the litter box, that may be the last time she risks such a frightening experience. And if your cat likes to scratch the surface surrounding her litter box (which some cats do), she may find a cold cement floor unappealing.

So you may have to compromise. The litter box should be kept in a spot that affords your cat some privacy yet is also conveniently located. If you place the litter box in a closet or a bathroom, be sure the door is wedged open from both sides to prevent her from being trapped inside or locked out. Depending on the location, you might consider cutting a hole in a closet door and adding a pet door.

Pick of the Litter

Research has shown that most cats prefer fine-grained litters, presumably because they have a softer feel. The new scoopable (clumping) litters usually have finer grains than the typical clay litter and are very popular. But high-quality, dust-free, clay litters are relatively small-grained and may be perfectly acceptable to your cat.

If you suspect your cat has spent part of his life outdoors and is likely to eliminate in your houseplants, try mixing some potting soil with your regular litter; pellet-type litters or those made from citrus peels are not recommended. Once you find a litter your cat likes, stick with it. Buying the least expensive litter or the brand that’s on sale any given week could result in your cat not using the litter box.

Many cats are put off by the odor of scented or deodorant litters. For the same reason, it’s not a good idea to place a room deodorizer or air freshener near the litter box. A thin layer of baking soda placed on the bottom of the box will help absorb odors without repelling your cat, and odors shouldn’t really be a problem if you keep the litter box clean. If you find the litter box odor offensive, your cat probably finds it even more offensive and won’t want to eliminate there.

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What's the Magic Number?

You should have at least as many litter boxes as you have cats. That way, none of them will ever be prevented from eliminating in the litter box because it's already occupied. You might also consider placing litter boxes in several locations around the house, so that no one cat can prevent the other cats from getting access. We also recommend that you place at least one litter box on each level of your house.

It's not possible to designate a personal litter box for each cat in your household, as cats may use any litter box that's available, and that means a cat may occasionally refuse to use a litter box after another cat has used it. In this case, all of the litter boxes will need to be kept extremely clean and additional boxes may be needed.

An Undercover Operation? Potential Problems of Covered Litter Boxes

Some people prefer to provide their cats with a covered litter box, but doing so may introduce some problems.

You may forget to clean the litter box as frequently as you should because the dirty litter is "out of sight, out of mind." A covered litter box traps odors inside, so it will need to be cleaned more often than an open one. A dirty, covered litter box is to your cat what a portapotty is to you!

A covered litter box may not allow a large cat sufficient room to turn around, scratch, dig, or position herself in the way she wants.

A covered litter box may make it easier for another cat to lay in wait and ambush the user as she exits the box; on the other hand, a covered litter box may feel more private, and timid cats may prefer it.

To discover which type of litter box your cat prefers, you may want to experiment by offering both types at first.

Keeping It Clean

To meet the needs of the most discriminating cat, feces should be scooped out of the litter box daily. How often you actually change (replace) the litter depends on the number of cats you have, the number of litter boxes, and the type of litter you use. Twice a week is a general guideline for clay litter, but depending on the circumstances, you may

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need to replace it every other day or only once a week. If you clean the litter box daily, scoopable litter may only need to be changed every two to three weeks. If you notice an odor or if much of the litter is wet or clumped, it's time for a change. Don't use strong smelling chemicals or cleaning products when washing the litter box, as doing so may cause your cat to avoid the box. Some cleaning products are toxic to cats. Washing with soap and water should be sufficient.

Liner Notes

Some cats don't mind having a plastic liner in the litter box, while others do. Again, you may want to experiment to see if your cat is bothered by a liner in the box. If you do use a liner, make sure it's anchored in place, so it can't easily catch your cat's claws or be pulled out of place.

Depth of Litter

Some people think that the more litter they put in the box, the less often they will have to clean it, but that's a mistake. Most cats won't use litter that's more than about two inches deep. In fact, some long-haired cats actually prefer less litter and a smooth, slick surface, such as the bottom of the litter box. The fact is the litter box needs to be cleaned on a regular basis, and adding extra litter is not a way around that chore.

"Litter-Training" Cats

There's really no such thing as "litter-training" a cat in the same way one would houstrain a dog. A cat doesn't need to be taught what to do with a litter box because instinct will generally take over. The only thing you need to do is provide an acceptable, accessible litter box, using the suggestions above. It's not necessary to take your cat to the litter box and move her paws back and forth in the litter; in fact, we don't recommend it, as such an unpleasant experience is likely to initiate a negative association with the litter box.

If Problems Develop

If your cat begins to eliminate in areas other than the litter box, your first call should always be to your veterinarian. Many medical conditions can cause a change in a cat's litter box habits. If your veterinarian determines that your cat is healthy, the cause may be a simple behavior problem that can be resolved by using behavior modification techniques. Punishment is not the answer, nor is banishing your cat outdoors. For long-standing or complex situations, contact an animal-behavior specialist who has experience working with cats.

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Solving Litter Box Problems

IF YOU'RE HAVING A HARD TIME persuading your cat to head for the litter box when it's appropriate, it may be time to draw a line in the sand. Most cats prefer eliminating on a loose, grainy substance, which is why they quickly learn to use a litter box. But when their preferences include the laundry basket, the bed, or the Persian rug, you may find yourself with a difficult problem. By taking a closer look at your cat's environment, you should be able to identify factors that have contributed to the litter box problem and make changes that encourage your cat to head for the litter box once again.

A common reason why cats don't use the litter box is an aversion to the box, such as dislike of a covered box or dissatisfaction with the depth of the litter. Two other common reasons your cat may avoid the litter box are a preference for a particular type of litter not provided in the box or a preference for a particular location where there is no box.

Sometimes the problem is a combination of all three factors. To get to the answer, you'll need to do a little detective work—and remember, the original source of the problem may not be the reason it's continuing. For example, your cat may have stopped using the litter box because of a urinary tract infection, and then developed a surface preference for carpet and a location preference for the bedroom closet. If that's the case, you'll need to address all three of these factors to resolve the problem.

Cats don't stop using their litter boxes because they're upset at their human caregivers and determined to get revenge for something that offended or angered them. Because humans act for these reasons, it's easy for us to assume that our pets do as well. But animals don't act out of spite or revenge, so it won't help to punish your cat or give her special privileges in the hope that she'll start using the litter box again.

Medical Problems

It's common for cats with medical problems to begin eliminating outside of their litter boxes. For example, a urinary tract infection or crystals in the urine can make urination very painful—and both are serious conditions that require medical attention. Cats often associate this pain with the litter box and begin to avoid it. So if your cat has a house-soiling problem, check with your veterinarian first to rule

out any medical problems as a cause of the behavior. Cats don't always act sick even when they are, and only a trip to the veterinarian for a thorough physical examination can rule out a medical problem.

Cleaning Soiled Areas

Because animals are highly motivated to continue soiling an area that smells like urine or feces—and because cats' sense of smell is so much stronger than humans'—it's important to thoroughly and properly clean the soiled areas.

Aversion to the Litter Box

Your cat may have decided that the litter box is an unpleasant place to eliminate if:

- The box is not clean enough for her.
- She has experienced painful urination or defecation in the box due to a medical problem.
- She has been startled by a noise while using the box.
- She has been ambushed while in the box either by another cat, a child, a dog, or by you, if you were attempting to catch her for some reason.
- She associates the box with punishment (for example, someone punished her for eliminating outside the box, then placed her in the box).

What You Can Do

Keep the litter box extremely clean. Scoop at least once a day and change the litter completely every four to five days. If you use scoopable litter, you may not need to change the litter as frequently, depending on the number of cats in the household, the size of the cats, and the number of litter boxes.

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If you can smell the box, then you can be pretty sure it's offensive to your cat as well.

Add a new box in a different location, and use a different type of litter in the new box. Because your cat has decided that her old litter box is unpleasant, you'll want to make the new one different enough that she doesn't simply apply the old, negative associations to the new box.

Make sure that the litter box isn't near an appliance (such as a furnace) that makes noise, or in an area of the home that your cat doesn't frequent.

If ambushing is a problem, create more than one exit from the litter box, so that if the "ambusher" is waiting by one area, your cat always has an escape route.

If you have multiple cats, provide one litter box for each cat, plus one extra box in a different location.

Surface Preferences

All animals develop preferences for a particular surface on which they like to eliminate. These preferences may be established early in life, but they may also change overnight for reasons that we don't always understand. Your cat may have a surface preference if:

- She consistently eliminates on a particular texture—for example, soft-textured surfaces such as carpeting, bedding, or clothing, or slick-textured surfaces such as tile, cement, bathtubs, or sinks.
- She frequently scratches on this same texture after elimination, even if she eliminates in the litter box.
- She is or was previously an outdoor cat and prefers to eliminate on grass or soil.

What You Can Do

If you recently changed the type or brand of your cat's litter, go back to providing the litter that your cat had been using. If your cat is eliminating on soft surfaces, try using a high-quality scoopable litter.

If your cat is eliminating on slick, smooth surfaces, try putting a very thin layer of litter at one end of the box, leaving the other end bare, and put the box on a hard floor.

If your cat has a history of being outdoors, add some soil or sod to the litter box.

To discourage your cat from using a certain area, cover the area with an upside-down carpet runner or aluminum foil, or place citrus-scented cotton balls over the area.

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- Removing Pet Stains and Odors
- Reducing Urine-Marking Behavior in Dogs and Cats

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Location Preferences

Your cat may have a location preference if:

- She always eliminates in quiet, protected places, such as under a desk, beneath a staircase, or in a closet.
- She eliminates in an area where the litter box was previously kept or where there are urine odors.
- She eliminates on a different level of the home from where the litter box is located.

What You Can Do

Put at least one litter box on every level of your home. (Remember, a properly cleaned litter box does not smell.)

To make the area where she has been eliminating less appealing to your cat, cover the area with an upside-down carpet runner or aluminum foil, place citrus-scented cotton balls over the area, or place water bowls in the area (because cats often don't like to eliminate near where they eat or drink) or put a litter box in the location where your cat has been eliminating. When she has consistently used this box for at least one month, you may gradually move it to a more convenient location at the rate of an inch—seriously!—per day.

Everyone Makes Mistakes

If you catch your cat in the act of eliminating outside the litter box, do something to interrupt her like making a startling noise, but be careful not to scare her. Immediately take her to the litter box and set her on the floor nearby. If she wanders over to the litter box, wait and praise her after she eliminates in the box. If she takes off in another direction, she may want privacy, so watch from afar until she goes back to the litter box and eliminates, then praise her when she does.

Don't ever punish your cat for eliminating outside of the litter box. By the time you find the soiled area, it's too late to administer a correction. Do nothing but clean it up. Rubbing your cat's nose in it, taking her to the spot and scolding her, or inflicting any other type of punishment will only make her afraid of you or afraid to eliminate in your presence. Animals don't understand punishment after the fact, even if it's only seconds later, and trying to punish them will often make matters worse.

Other Types of House Soiling Problems

Marking/Spraying: To determine if your cat is marking or spraying, consult a veterinarian or animal behaviorist.

Fears or Phobias: When animals become frightened, they may lose control of their bladders or bowels. If your cat is afraid of loud noises, strangers, or other animals, she may soil the home when she is exposed to these stimuli.

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BEHAVIOR
SERIES

Using Aversives to Modify Your Cat's Behavior

WE'RE ALL FAMILIAR WITH the impact that curiosity can have on a cat's life expectancy, but a cat's penchant for nosing around can be pretty upsetting to his caregivers as well. That's why some cat owners seek to deter their felines from doing certain things through the use of "aversives." Aversives are tools and techniques used to keep cats away from particular places or to stop them from engaging in undesirable behaviors.

Establishing an effective aversive stimulus to prevent various antics is often a case of trial and error, as individual reactions will vary with each cat. But don't forget that even after you've found the best method to discourage a cat from a particular action or place, the approach will seldom work effectively unless you offer a *positive* alternative that is both convenient and rewarding.

What are some typical aversives used by cat caregivers? Here's a rundown of some common deterrents, each of which will have varying degrees of success depending on the objective and the cat.

Textures

One way to keep your cat away from certain areas is to surround (or cover) the area with materials that make your cat's paws uncomfortable. Try shelf paper (sticky side up) or double-sided carpet tape. Heavy plastic carpet runner (pointed side up) can also be used effectively in some situations.

You may need to weight the material firmly or tape it down to ensure it stays put. To protect furniture or floor finishes from sticky substances, attach the aversive to a piece of foil or heavy plastic and secure that with weights or light tape.

Smells

Because cats are often attracted or repelled by certain scents, you can set boundaries by soaking cotton balls, rags, or washcloths in a "stinky" substance that is not harmful to cats. To help protect carpets, upholstery, floors, or furniture, place the saturated object on a piece of weighted foil or heavy plastic. To prevent the substance from seeping into the ground, use the same precautions. Some of the most effective substances to apply include the following:

- Citrus odors—such as concentrated juices or fresh peels
- Colognes
- Some muscle rubs (*NOTE: Some cats react to menthol as they do to catnip—beware!*)
- Aloe gel

Tastes

Just as certain odors will discourage cats from visiting places where you don't want them, certain displeasing tastes will keep them from returning. Some of the following substances may damage furniture or floor

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finishes, however, so be sure to test them in a hidden location before widespread use.

- Bitter Apple® or similar sprays and gels marketed specifically for pet taste aversion
- Some muscle rubs
- Citrus, such as from concentrated juices or fresh peels
- Aloe gel

Human-Controlled Aversives

Some items can be used to distract your cat and thereby interrupt his unwanted behavior. Such devices are not meant to terrify your cat, but to provide a brief distraction. It's best if your cat does not perceive the distraction as coming from you. In the instant your cat's attention is focused on the distracting action, redirect his behavior to an appropriate object, and then give him lots of praise. Some effective aversives that you control include:

- Spray bottle or squirt gun filled with water or a combination of water and vinegar (*NOTE: Avoid high-powered water guns that have a very forceful spray*)
- Loud air horn
- Whistle
- Shaker can (soda can filled with nails, pennies, beans, or pebbles—then securely taped shut)

Surprise! Remote Aversives

Sometimes the best approach for teaching an animal is to work from a distance. If every aversive is delivered when you're in the room, your cat may quickly learn, for example, to jump on the coffee table only when you're not around. A few good approaches include:

- Motion detectors that react with a startling sound
- Snappy trainer (an upside-down mouse trap that's securely taped under paper to avoid injury)
- Aluminum pie plate containing water, beans, or pebbles—preferably balanced precariously on a counter or other undesirable “jumping” surface so that it will fall off when your cat jumps up
- ScatMat® (which delivers a very slight electrical shock)

When using aversives, remember that they offer the advantage of modifying certain feline behaviors in ways that distance the “correction” from you, the caregiver. Experiment with different types of aversives and try to match the aversive to the cat. For example, using a surprise technique on a cat who tends to be fearful should be a last resort.

Above all, be patient and give your feline frequent play sessions and attention as well as appropriate objects for him to scratch, claw, and climb. That way, your cat's antics will amuse you instead of annoy you, and the special bond between both of you will continue to grow.

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BEHAVIOR
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Positive Reinforcement

Training Your Cat

WE ALL LIKE TO BE PRAISED rather than punished. The same is true for your cat, and that's the theory behind positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement means giving your pet something pleasant or rewarding immediately after she does something you want her to do. Because your praise or reward makes her more likely to repeat that behavior in the future, it is one of your most powerful tools for shaping or changing your cat's behavior. It's more effective to teach your pet what she should do than try to teach her what she shouldn't.

Correct timing is essential when using positive reinforcement. The reward must occur immediately—within seconds—or your cat may not associate it with the proper action. For example, when your cat uses her scratching post, you can throw a piece of dry cat food for her to chase as a reward. Many cats enjoy chasing (hunting) their food and it's good exercise too. But if you throw the food when she has stopped scratching the post and is walking toward you, she will think she's being rewarded for coming to you.

Consistency is also an important element in training. Everyone in the family should reward the same desired behaviors.

Using Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement may include food treats, praise, petting, or a favorite toy or game. When your pet is first learning a new behavior, such as clawing the scratching post instead of your couch, she should be rewarded every time you catch her using her scratching post. You may even help shape her behavior of using the scratching post by spraying it with catnip (if she reacts positively to catnip) or enticing her with a toy that you dangle on the post. Taking your cat over to the scratching post,

positioning her paws on the post, and raking them along the post to show her what she's supposed to do will likely have the opposite effect of encouraging her to use the post. She may interpret your actions as frightening and uncomfortable. It's important to look at the world from her point of view.

Once your cat reliably offers the desired behavior, you may reward her with treats intermittently, for example, three out of every four times she does the behavior. Then, over time, reward her about half the time, then about a third of the time, and so on, until you're only rewarding her occasionally with a treat. Continue to praise her every time. Your cat will learn that if she keeps offering desired behaviors, eventually she'll get what she wants—your praise and an occasional treat. You won't be forever bound to carry a pocketful of goodies, but it's fun to surprise your cat from time to time.

The Pros and Cons of Punishment

Punishment can be verbal, postural, or physical and is meant to make your pet immediately associate something unpleasant when she does something you don't want her

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to do. The punishment makes it less likely that the behavior will occur again. To be effective, punishment must be delivered while your pet is engaged in the undesirable behavior—in other words, “caught in the act.” If the punishment is delivered too late, even seconds later, your pet will not associate the punishment with the undesired behavior. The punishment will seem unpredictable to her.

Remember, cats do not act out of spite or revenge, and they don't have a moral sense of right and wrong. Never use physical punishment that involves discomfort or pain as this may cause her to bite, defend herself, or resort to other undesirable behaviors. Holding your cat's neck skin and shaking her may result in a frightened cat who scratches or bites to defend herself. And punishment might be associated with other stimuli, including people, that are present at the time the punishment occurs. For example, a cat who is punished for getting too close to a new baby may become fearful of, or aggressive toward, that baby—or toward other babies. That's why physical punishment is not only bad for your cat, it's also bad for you and others.

Punishment delivered by you may erode your cat's trust and frighten her. That's why punishment is most effective when it does not come directly from you. For example, if your cat enjoys scratching the couch, you may apply special double-sided tape to those surfaces. Cats rarely like sticky paws. Your cat will perceive the couch, instead of you, as delivering the punishment. In this way, too, your cat is more likely to avoid the undesirable behavior when you're not around. However, it is critical that while discouraging undesirable behaviors, you help your cat understand what you want her to do and provide appropriate outlets for her normal cat behaviors.

One of the reasons that cats are such fun companions is that when they're not sleeping, many of them enjoy playing. Playing helps your cat develop physically and behaviorally. Providing appropriate play outlets for your cat can reduce undesirable behaviors. Be sure your cat has safe toys to play with by herself, and don't underestimate the power of playing with your cat to strengthen the bond between you and enhance the quality of life for both of you.

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Cat Toys and How to Use Them

ALTHOUGH CATS generally have different play styles than their canine counterparts, toys are as much a necessity for cats as they are for dogs. Toys help fight boredom and give cats an outlet for their instinctive prey-chasing behaviors. And when you are the one moving the toy around while your cat fishes for it, chases after it, or jumps in pursuit of it, playtime becomes a bonding experience for you and your cat.

“Safe” Toys

Our mothers always told us “no playing ball in the house,” but cats can usually participate in that forbidden exercise without knocking down a vase or a lamp (and being grounded for two weeks). Still, there are plenty of factors that may contribute to the safety of the toy they’re batting around.

Many of those factors are completely dependent upon your cat’s size, activity level, and preferences. Another factor to be considered is the environment in which your cat spends her time. Although we can’t guarantee your cat’s enthusiasm or her safety with any specific toy, we can offer the following guidelines.

Be Cautious

The things that are usually the most attractive to cats are often the very things that are the most dangerous. Cat-proof your home by removing string, ribbon, yarn, rubber bands, plastic milk jug rings, paper clips, pins, needles, dental floss, and anything else that could be ingested. All of these items are dangerous, no matter how cute your cat may appear when she’s playing with them.

Avoid or alter any toys that aren’t “cat proof” by removing ribbons, feathers, strings, eyes, or other small parts that could be chewed and ingested.

Soft toys should be machine washable. Look for stuffed toys that are labeled as safe for children under three years of age and that don’t contain any dangerous fillings. Problem fillings include things like nutshells and polystyrene beads. Remember that rigid toys are not as attractive to cats.

Recommended Toys

Active Toys

- Round plastic shower curtain rings, which are fun either as a single ring to bat around, hide, or carry, or when linked together and hung in an enticing spot.
- Plastic balls, with or without bells inside.
- Ping-Pong balls and plastic practice golf balls with holes to help cats carry them. Try putting one in a dry bathtub, as the captive ball is much more fun than one that escapes under the sofa. You’ll probably want to remove the balls from the bathtub before bedtime, or you may lose some sleep, as two o’clock in the morning seems to be a prime time for this game.

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- Paper bags with any handles removed. Paper bags are good for pouncing, hiding, and interactive play. Plastic bags are not a good idea, as many cats like to chew and ingest the plastic.
- Sisal-wrapped toys, which are very attractive to cats who tend to ignore soft toys.
- Empty cardboard tubes from toilet paper and paper towels, made even more fun if you “unwind” a little cardboard to get them started.

Comfort Toys

- Soft stuffed animals, which are good for several purposes. For some cats, the stuffed animal should be small enough to carry around. For cats who want to wrestle with the toy, the stuffed animal should be about the same size as the cat. Toys with legs and a tail seem to be especially enticing to cats.
- Cardboard boxes, especially those a little too small for your cat to fit into.

Catnip

- Catnip-filled soft toys, which cats like to kick, carry, and rub. Catnip is not addictive and is perfectly safe for cats to roll in, rub in, or eat.
- Plain catnip can be crushed and sprinkled on the carpet or, for easier cleanup, on a towel placed on the floor. Catnip oils will often stay in the carpet, and although they’re not visible to us, your cat will still be able to smell them.
- Catnip sprays rarely have enough power to be attractive to cats.
- Not all cats are affected by catnip. Some cats may become overstimulated to the point of aggressive play and others may become relaxed.
- Kittens under six months old seem to be immune to catnip.

Get the Most out of Toys!

- Rotate your cat’s toys weekly by making only a few available at a time. Keep a variety of types easily accessible. If your cat has a favorite, like a soft “baby” that she loves to cuddle with, you may want to leave that one out all the time.
- Provide toys that offer a variety of uses—at least one toy to carry, one to wrestle with, one to roll, and one to “baby.”
- Hide-and-seek is a fun game for cats. “Found” toys are often much more attractive than a toy which is obviously introduced.
- Many of your cat’s toys should be interactive. Interactive play is very important for your cat because she needs active “people time”—and such play also enhances the bond between you and your pet. Cats generally engage in three types of play—“fishing, flying, and chasing”—and all types are much more engaging for cats when you are part of them.

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BEHAVIOR
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Understanding Your Talkative Cat

WHILE WE HUMANS MAY NOT YET BE ADEPT at holding conversations in cat-speak, cats nonetheless use their language to communicate with us and other animals. Some cats “talk” more than others, but most cats do make noise some of the time, and they expect us to know what they’re saying.

We’re all familiar with the meaning of hissing and growling, but there are many other sounds your cat is capable of making, and a variety of reasons for vocalizing.

Medical Reasons

If your cat’s behavior changes suddenly, the first thing you should do is take her to your veterinarian for a thorough health examination. Cats often hide symptoms of illness until they’re seriously ill; any change in behavior may be an early indication of a medical problem. A new vocalizing behavior, in particular, may indicate physical discomfort stemming from an urgent need for medical attention. A normally vocal cat who stops talking is also in need of a medical checkup.

Breed Tendency

Asian breeds, such as the Siamese, are known to be very vocal. If your cat has a pointed face and a long, lean body, chances are she has some Asian heritage, so “talking” may be a part of her character. If your cat’s chatter bothers you, then avoid giving her any attention when she is vocal because this will only encourage the vocal behavior. Instead, give her attention when she is quiet.

Attention-Seeking Behavior

Some cats “talk” because they know they’ll get a reaction. People may talk back, put out some food, pick up and soothe the cat, or even pick the animal up and temporarily “lock” her in another room. All of these responses will encourage an attention-seeking cat. To discourage this behavior, simply ignore your cat when she does this, and when she is quiet, pour on the love, feed her, or give her some treats. This will teach your cat which behaviors you would like her to continue.

Your Cat Wants to Go Outside

If your cat was previously an outdoor cat and you plan to keep her safely inside, then good for you! The following are some suggestions to help make the transition easier on both of you:

- **Spay or Neuter Your Cat.** Spaying or neutering will rid your cat of those hormonal urges to go out and seek a mate. This will result in a calmer, friendlier cat.
- **Create a Play Schedule.** Schedule play times during the times your cat would normally be outside. This will distract her from her normal routine and establish another, safer routine.

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- **Provide a Window Seat.** Be sure your cat has a view of the outdoors and a sunny place to lie. Cats like to watch birds, so putting a bird feeder outside a window is likely to make the window a favorite spot for your cat.
- **Run a Scavenger Hunt.** Give your cat a game to play by hiding bits of dry food around the house. Hide the food in paper bags, boxes, and behind open doors. This will give her exercise and keep her busy so she doesn't think of going outside. This is especially good to do right before the family leaves the house for the day.
- **Pay Attention.** Try to give your cat extra love and attention during this difficult transition.
- **Try Aversives.** If your cat still won't give up meowing by the door, try an "aversive." For example, leave a strong citrus scent by the door to help make the area undesirable to your cat. Totally ignore her vocalizations. Whenever she is quiet, give her a food treat and encourage her to play or cuddle.

Grief

After the death or departure of a person or animal in your cat's life, she may vocalize to express her grief. This can be a normal part of the grieving process. The best thing you can do for her is keep her schedule the same (or as close to it as possible) and spend some extra time cuddling and playing with her. With time, this problem should take care of itself. If your cat does not return to her normal self, consult your veterinarian.

Transition

If your cat is new to your home or has just gone through a change—such as a person or other animal moving into or out of the home—and she has just started her talkative behavior, be patient. This may be happening due to the transition and will stop on its own if the behavior is not encouraged. Remember, even scolding can be perceived by your cat as attention, and thus encourage the behavior.

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Solving Aggression Between Family Cats

IF THE BATTLES between your feline family members are anything like the struggle between Cain and Abel, there are a few things you can do to prevent the “sibling rivalry” from reaching biblical proportions. Of course, it’s almost impossible to guess how well any particular pair or group of cats will ultimately tolerate each other: Some unusually territorial cats may never adjust to sharing their house and may do best in a one-cat family. But many aggression problems between cats can be successfully resolved, even if the two don’t end up best friends when all is said and done. You’ll need to commit time and effort to solve aggression problems between cats—don’t give up without consulting the appropriate experts.

Common Types of Aggressive Behaviors Between Cats

Territorial Aggression

Territorial aggression occurs when a cat feels that his territory has been invaded by an intruder. Cats are very territorial—much more so than dogs—and female cats can be just as territorial as males. The behavior patterns in this type of aggression include chasing and ambushing the intruder, as well as hissing and swatting when contact occurs. Territorial problems often occur when a new cat is brought into a household, when a young kitten reaches maturity, or when a cat sees or encounters neighborhood cats outside. It’s not uncommon for a cat to be territorially aggressive toward one cat in a family yet friendly and tolerant to another.

Inter-Male Aggression

Adult male cats normally tend to threaten and sometimes fight with other males. These behaviors can occur as sexual challenges over a female or to achieve a relatively high position in the cats’ loosely organized social hierarchy. This type of aggression involves much ritualized body posturing, stalking, staring, yowling, and howling. Attacks are usually avoided if one cat “backs down” and

walks away. If an attack occurs, the attacker will usually jump forward, directing a bite to the nape of the neck, while the opponent falls to the ground on his back and attempts to bite and scratch the attacker’s belly with his hind legs. The cats may roll around biting and screaming, suddenly stop, resume posturing, fight again, or walk away. Cats don’t often injure one another this way, but you should always check for puncture wounds, which are prone to infection. Neutered males are much less likely to fight in this way—yet another great reason for having your animal sterilized.

Defensive Aggression

Defensive aggression occurs when a cat is attempting to protect himself from an attack he believes he cannot escape. This can occur in response to punishment or the threat of punishment from a person, an attack or attempted attack from another cat, or any incident that makes the animal feel threatened or afraid. Defensive postures include crouching with the legs pulled in under the body, laying the ears back, tucking the tail, and rolling slightly to the side. These responses are not the same as the submissive postures dogs show because they’re not intended to “turn off” an attack from another cat. Continuing to approach a cat in this posture is likely to precipitate an attack.

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Redirected Aggression

This type of aggression is directed toward another animal, or even a person, who didn't initially provoke the behavior. For example, an indoor cat sitting in the window may see an outdoor cat walk across the front yard. Because he can't attack the outdoor cat, he may instead turn and attack the family cat sitting next to him in the window.

What You Can Do

- If your cat's behavior changes suddenly, your first step should always be to contact your veterinarian for a thorough health examination. Cats often hide symptoms of illness until they're seriously ill, and any change in behavior may be an early indication of a medical problem.
- Spay or neuter any intact pets in your home. The behavior of one intact animal can affect all of your pets.
- Start the slow introduction process over from the beginning. You may want to talk to an animal-behavior specialist for help implementing these techniques.
- In extreme cases, consult with your veterinarian about medicating your cats while you're working on a behavior-modification program. Your veterinarian is the only person who is licensed and qualified to prescribe medication for your cat, so don't attempt to give your cat any over-the-counter or prescription medication without some guidance. Animals don't respond to drugs the same way people do, and a medication that may be safe for a human could be fatal to an animal. Also keep in mind that medication, by itself, isn't a permanent solution and should only be used in conjunction with behavior modification.

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- [Introducing Your New Cat to Your Other Pets](#)

What NOT To Do

- If your cats are fighting, don't allow the fights to continue. Because cats are so territorial, and because they don't establish firm dominance hierarchies, they won't be able to "work things out" as dogs sometimes do. The more often cats fight, the worse the problem is likely to become. To stop a fight in progress, make a loud noise (like blowing a whistle), squirt the cats with water, or throw something soft at them. Don't try to pull them apart.
- Prevent future fights. This may mean keeping the cats totally separated from each other while you're working on the problem, or at least preventing contact between them during situations likely to trigger a fight.
- Don't try to punish the cats involved. Punishment is likely to elicit further aggression and fearful responses, which will only make the problem worse. If you attempt to punish either combatant, you may even become a target for redirected aggression.

Because their social organization is somewhat flexible, some cats are relatively willing to share their house and territory with multiple cats. It's not uncommon for a cat to tolerate some cats, but not get along with others in the house. But the more cats who share the same territory, the more likely it is that some of your cats will begin fighting with each other.

When you introduce cats to each other, one of them may send "play" signals which can be misinterpreted by the other cat. If those signals are interpreted as aggression by one of the cats, then you should handle the situation as "aggression" and seek professional help right away.

There are many factors that determine how well cats will get along with one another, but even animal-behavior experts don't fully understand them. What we do know is that cats who are well socialized (those who had pleasant experiences with other cats during kittenhood) will likely be more sociable than those who haven't been around many other cats.

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BEHAVIOR
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Reducing Your Cat's Fearful Behavior

FIGHT, FLEE, OR FREEZE. No, it isn't the latest game show sweeping the nation. Instead, these three "f's" describe the ways that cats usually respond to objects, persons, or situations they perceive as a threat.

It's normal for you to want to help and comfort your cat when she's frightened. However, that isn't necessarily the best thing to do from your cat's point of view. It's normal for a cat to feel insecure or frightened in a new environment. Often, your new cat will hide for a day or two when you first bring her home. Sometimes a traumatic experience—such as taking her for a car ride to the veterinarian or introducing a new animal into the home—can disrupt her routine and send her under the bed for a few days.

Each cat has her preferred way of dealing with a crisis. You'll notice that your cat probably tends to try one option first, and if that doesn't work, she's forced to try a different option. For instance, if your cat is afraid of dogs and a friend brings his dog to your home to visit, your cat puffs out her fur to make herself look big, then hisses and spits at the dog. If the dog doesn't retreat, your cat may flee the situation, find a hiding spot, and freeze until she deems the situation safe.

Your cat may show the following behaviors when she is fearful:

- Fleeing
- Hiding

- Aggression (which includes spitting, hissing, growling, swatting, biting, scratching, puffing fur and tail, arching back, swishing tail, and flattening ears)
- Loss of control over bladder or bowels
- Freezing

Although some fearful behaviors are acceptable, overly anxious or fearful cats may need help from you in the form of training, patience, and love.

What Causes Fearful Behavior?

You'll need to observe your cat closely to determine the trigger for her fearful behavior. Keep in mind that just because you know that the person or animal approaching your cat has good intentions doesn't mean your cat shares the same view. The trigger for her fearful behavior could be anything. Some common triggers are:

- A particular person
- A stranger
- Another animal
- A child
- Loud noises

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What You Can Do

Take the following steps to reduce your cat's anxiety and help her become more confident:

- First, schedule an appointment with your veterinarian for a thorough physical examination to rule out any medical reasons for your cat's fearful behavior. Cats don't always act sick, even when they are. Any sudden behavior change could mean that your cat is ill. Some common symptoms that suggest your cat may be sick are sudden aggressiveness, hiding, and eliminating outside the litter box.
- If your cat is healthy, but hiding, leave her alone. She'll come out when she's ready. Forcing her out of her hiding spot will only make her more fearful. Make sure she has easy access to food, water, and her litter box. Clean the litter box and change the food and water every day so you know whether she is eating and drinking.
- Keep any contact with the fear stimulus to a minimum.
- Keep your cat's routine as consistent as possible. Cats feel more confident if they know when to expect daily feeding, playing, cuddling, and grooming.
- Try to desensitize your cat to the fear stimulus by following these steps:
 - Determine what distance your cat can be from the fear stimulus without responding fearfully.
 - Introduce the fear stimulus at this distance while you're feeding your cat tasty treats and praising her.
 - Slowly move the fear stimulus closer as you continue to praise your cat and offer her treats.
 - If at any time during this process your cat shows fearful behavior, you've proceeded too quickly and will need to start over from the beginning. This is the most common mistake people make when desensitizing an animal; it can be avoided by working in short sessions, paying careful attention to your cat so that you don't progress too rapidly for her.
 - You may need help with the desensitization process from an animal-behavior specialist.

Related topics at www.petsforlife.org

- Cat Aggression toward People

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A Note about Aggression

If your cat seriously threatens you, another person, or an animal—and the behavior is not an isolated incident—you should seek help as soon as possible from an animal-behavior specialist. Contact your veterinarian or animal shelter for assistance or a referral if you need a specialist. To keep everyone safe in the meantime, confine your cat to an area of the house where all interactions with her are kept to a minimum and are supervised by a responsible person.

Cat bites and scratches are serious and can easily become infected. Bites that need to be treated by a doctor should be reported to your local animal control agency; your cat may need to be quarantined and watched for signs of rabies. If you can't keep your cat separated from the stimulus that triggers her aggressive behavior and you're unable to work with an animal-behavior specialist, you may need to reevaluate the cat's situation in your home. Remember, trying to place an aggressive cat in a new home should be done with extreme caution. The safety of your cat and of the other animals and humans she encounters should be your first consideration.

What Not to Do

- Do not punish your cat for her fearful behavior. Animals associate punishment with what they're doing at the time they're punished, so your cat is likely to associate any punishment you give her with you. This will only cause her to become fearful of you, and she still won't understand why she's being punished.
- Do not force your cat to experience the object or situation that is causing her fear. For example, if she is afraid of a certain person, don't let that person try to pick her up and hold her; this will only make her more fearful of that person.
- Be cautious in handling your cat when she is frightened. She may accidentally direct her aggression toward you.

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BEHAVIOR
SERIES

Discouraging Free-Roaming Cats

MANY PEOPLE HAVE A PROBLEM WITH free-roaming cats who hunt wild birds as they feed or nest in their yards, who use their garden as a litter box, or who upset their pets by invading their territory. You certainly have the right to enjoy your yard and the birds who visit it. However, it's your responsibility to solve your free-roaming cat problem humanely.

Why Are They Picking on Me?

Although a destructive neighborhood cat can be frustrating, don't take it personally. The cat isn't acting out of spite or picking on you for some unknown reason. He's behaving naturally. The problem, of course, is that he's doing so in places you find inappropriate. The solution lies in making those places undesirable so the cat will behave naturally somewhere else.

Most cats won't eat birds, but they do enjoy the "thrill of the hunt." Cats have preyed upon birds for thousands of years, and there's no foolproof way to discourage this natural instinct.

Another natural feline instinct is to defecate in areas where the cat can cover his scent by burying the waste. Therefore, a cat who spends most of his time outdoors appreciates the soft, pre-dug dirt of your garden—or your child's sandbox—as a handy toilet.

When a cat naps on the hood of your car or in the center of your flowerbed, he's simply sunning himself in a nice, warm spot and doesn't realize the damage he's doing. He won't connect your negative reaction with the place where he naps, and although he may learn to avoid you, he won't avoid the place or stop the activity.

A free-roaming cat may approach your window or patio door and challenge your cat or dog through the glass with body language or vocal insults. The best way to protect your pet from this situation is to keep the outside cat away from the areas that your pet can see by using the techniques described below.

Of course, the ideal solution is for all cat owners to keep their cats safely confined. Unfortunately, not all cat owners are willing to do this, so you'll need to take steps to solve

the problem without harming the cat, the birds, other animals, or your yard and garden. Because each situation is different, you may need patience and ingenuity to find the appropriate deterrent through trial and error.

Repellents

Repellents and devices designed to startle the cat "in the act" will work best to condition him to avoid the area. Never use poisons. Not only is poisoning animals inhumane and illegal, it's not an effective solution to the problem. Poisons will only rid you of one "pest" and won't deter any others. You'd have no way of knowing or controlling who might find and ingest the poisonous substance.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has registered more than 30 compounds for safe use in repelling domestic cats. Check with any pet supply store or garden supplier for commercial cat repellents. Most commercial repellents are based on the simple mothball compound. Mothballs or moth crystals, encased in cheesecloth bags to help protect the soil, work well to keep cats from digging in garden areas or potted plants.

Keep in mind that the effectiveness of any repellent will deteriorate with moisture and time. Whether you use mothballs or a commercial mixture, you'll need to reapply the solution after each rain, heavy dew, or watering. Check with your garden supplier to be certain that the solution you choose won't harm plants growing in that area, especially if you use fertilizers or other soil additives.

For areas where cats want to dig, ornamental pebbles may be an effective deterrent. Avoid pebbles that are very round or smooth, as they make a great cat bed. Rocks or pebbles should be placed in a way that makes it difficult for them

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to be dispersed. Small-gauge chicken wire can also be buried under a light layer of dirt or mulch, and may even restrain some weeds. The sharp pebbles or rough wire will be uncomfortable to soft paws.

“Surprise” Devices

To teach a cat to avoid a specific area, you must make that area unattractive to him. The best method is to surprise the cat “in the act” but without the cat knowing that you are the one administering the surprise. Simple devices can effectively booby-trap the area that a cat has found attractive.

- **Sound and Movement:** Scatter dry beans, macaroni, or birdseed on a metal tray; disposable pie pans or cookie sheets work well and are inexpensive. Balance several trays along the fence, porch or deck railing, the windowsill, or around the edge of any vehicle where the cat jumps onto the surface. Birds can still land safely if the trays are balanced properly, but the weight of a cat leaping onto the surface will upset the tray. The cat will be startled by the noise and by the unsteady, collapsing perch. As a variation on this “falling tray” method, set shallow plastic lids filled with water on each end of the tray to add a shower to the noise and movement of the falling tray.
- **Texture:** To keep a cat from jumping onto flat surfaces (railings, vehicles, or decks), criss-cross double-sided tape onto a piece of sturdy plastic—either a heavy, plastic drop cloth or a vinyl tablecloth would work well. Drape the plastic over the surface and secure it with cord, or at least one weighted object, to keep it in position. The sticky tape is annoying to the cat (without causing pain or panic), and the slick plastic not only rattles but also offers no foothold. An alternative to sticky tape would be to use a plastic carpet protector with the knobby side up.
- **Water:** This method works especially well for those areas where birds feed on the ground or where cats are using a garden area as a litter box. When the temperature permits, turn on a water sprinkler during the usual time of disturbance (which may be dawn or dusk if the cat is on your property to hunt). A timing device for the sprinkler, set to a staggered schedule, will help discourage those intelligent cats who would otherwise simply avoid the area at “regularly wet” times of day. A motion-detector sprinkler, designed specifically for deterring cats and other animals from gardens and other areas, is another option.
- **Obstacle:** If your bird feeder or birdhouse is mounted on a post, nail a galvanized metal guard in the shape of an inverted cone to the post to protect the platform.

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Responsibility

If these suggested remedies fail to provide relief, your next step is to establish who cares for the cat. In many cases, the “problem cat” may be an owned cat who is allowed to roam, or the cat may have no real owner. If the cat belongs to a neighbor, your problem is a shared one. It’s not always easy to discuss neighborhood issues diplomatically. Remember that the cat is your neighbor’s pet, even though he’s a nuisance when he’s on your property. By emphasizing your concern for the cat’s safety, instead of the problems he’s causing, you have a greater chance of gaining your neighbor’s cooperation.

If you’re unable to determine who owns the cat, the problem is in your hands. In some cases it may be difficult to distinguish a feral (semi-wild) cat from a potentially friendly stray, so unless the cat comes to you fairly readily when you squat down nearby and gently call to him, play it safe and don’t touch the cat (if you are able to get close enough in the first place). Even some well-socialized cats despise being picked up by strangers. Assuming you’ve already tried the reconditioning tactics mentioned above without success, you may need to resort to a humane trap.

Humane Traps

Don’t use anything other than a humane cage trap designed to lure a cat into the cage with food and to safely contain him until he can be moved to another area. Most animal control agencies and humane societies loan or rent out these traps, and some will even deliver or pick them up. Be sure to find out how to set and bait the trap, how to cover the trap, and how often to check the trap.

If you have any reason to believe that the cat has an owner, please think twice before trapping the cat, unless you plan to return him to his owner.

If the cat is feral and unowned, check with your community’s animal care and control agency or local humane society for information on trap, test, vaccinate, alter, release, and monitor (TTVARM) programs in your area.

To trap a stray cat, bait the trap with canned cat food. Place the trap in an area that’s sheltered against the weather. You may hear some alarming noises when the cat realizes he’s trapped. Immediately cover the trap with a sheet, blanket, or towel large enough to cover the entire trap; this will calm the cat considerably and prevent him from injuring himself in the trap. If the cat is confined with no access to water or shelter from inclement weather or predators, it’s important that you remove the trap from the area immediately. Using gloves to prevent scratches or bites, put the trap in a protected area until you can take the cat to an animal shelter or veterinarian (which should be as soon as possible).

Many owned cats, unfortunately, don’t wear collars with identification. An owned cat who is lost may behave fearfully. If the cat is unknown to you, take him to your local animal shelter. He will be cared for there, and his owners will have a better chance of reclaiming him. If he is not reclaimed, you may be able to take the cat yourself if you wish. That way, you can keep him safely confined in your home, where he belongs, with you.

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BEHAVIOR
SERIES

Cats: Destructive Scratching

Although some people think a cat's scratching behavior is a reflection of her distaste for a couch's upholstery, a not-so-subtle hint to open the drapes, or a poorly conceived Zorro impersonation, the fact is that cats scratch objects in their environment for many perfectly normal reasons.

Why Do Cats Scratch?

Cats scratch for many reasons, including:

- To remove the dead outer layer of their claws.
- To mark their territory by leaving both a visual mark and a scent—they have scent glands on their paws.
- To stretch their bodies and flex their feet and claws.
- To work off energy.

Because scratching is a normal behavior and one that cats are highly motivated to display, it's unrealistic to try to prevent them from scratching. Instead, the goal in resolving scratching problems is to redirect the scratching onto acceptable objects.

Training Your Cat to Scratch Acceptable Objects

You must provide objects for scratching that are appealing, attractive, and convenient from your cat's point of view. Start by observing the physical features of the objects your cat is scratching. The answers to the following questions will help you understand your cat's scratching preferences:

- Where are they located? Prominent objects, objects close to sleeping areas, and objects near the entrance to a room are often chosen.

- What texture do they have—are they soft or coarse?
- What shape do they have—are they horizontal or vertical?
- How tall are they? At what height does your cat scratch?

Now, considering your cat's demonstrated preferences, substitute similar objects for her to scratch (rope-wrapped posts, corrugated cardboard, or even a log). Place the acceptable object(s) near the inappropriate object(s) that she's already using. Make sure the objects are stable and won't fall over or move around when she uses them.

Cover the inappropriate objects with something your cat will find unappealing, such as double-sided sticky tape, aluminum foil, sheets of sandpaper, or a plastic carpet runner with the pointy side up. Or you may give the objects an aversive odor by attaching cotton balls containing perfume, a muscle rub, or other safe yet unpleasant substances. Be careful with odors, though, because you don't want the nearby acceptable objects to also smell unpleasant.

When your cat is consistently using the appropriate object, it can be moved very gradually (no more than three inches each day) to a location more suitable to you. It's best, however, to keep the appropriate scratching objects as close to your cat's preferred scratching locations as possible.

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Don't remove the unappealing coverings or odors from the inappropriate objects until your cat is consistently using the appropriate objects in their permanent locations for several weeks, or even a month. They should then be removed gradually, not all at once.

Should I Punish My Cat for Scratching?

NO! Punishment is effective only if you catch your cat in the act of scratching unacceptable objects and have provided her with acceptable scratching objects. Punishment after the fact won't change the behavior, may cause her to be afraid of you or the environment, and may elicit defensive aggression. Used by itself, punishment won't resolve scratching problems because it doesn't teach your cat where to scratch instead. If you do catch your cat in the act of scratching inappropriate objects, punish her in a way that prevents her from associating the punishment with you. Try making a loud noise (using a whistle, shaking a soda can filled with rocks, or slapping the wall) or using a water-filled squirt bottle. If you use other, more interactive techniques, she'll learn to refrain from scratching in your presence but will continue to scratch when you're not around.

How Do I Trim My Cat's Claws?

To help keep them sharp, cats keep their claws retracted until they're needed. As the claws grow too long and become curved, they can't be retracted completely. You should clip off the sharp tips of your cat's claws on her front feet every two weeks or so. Clipping your cat's claws will also help prevent them from becoming snagged in carpets and fabrics, not to mention your skin!

Before trimming your cat's claws, help her get accustomed to having her paws handled and squeezed. You can do this by gently petting her legs and paws while giving her a treat. This will help to make it a more pleasant experience. Gradually increase the pressure so that petting becomes gentle squeezing, as you'll need to do this to extend the claw. Continue with the treats until your cat tolerates this kind of touching and restraint. It may take a little longer if she's not used to having her legs or paws handled.

Apply a small amount of pressure to her paw—with your thumb on top of her paw and your index finger underneath—until a claw is extended. You should be able to see the pink or "quick," which is a small blood vessel. Don't cut into this pink portion, as it will bleed and be painful for your cat. If you cut off just the sharp tip of the claw, the "hook," it will dull the claw and prevent extensive damage to household objects and to your skin.

There are several types of claw trimmers designed especially for pets. These are better than your own nail clipper because they won't crush the claw. Until you and your cat have become accustomed to the routine, one claw or foot a day is enough of a challenge. Don't push to do all of them at once, or you'll both have only negative memories of claw clippers!

Should I Declaw My Cat?

Declawing is a procedure whereby a veterinarian amputates the end digit and claw of a cat's paws—similar in scope to cutting off a person's finger at the last joint. The Humane Society of the United States opposes declawing when done solely for the convenience of the owner. Scratching is a natural behavior for cats and can be directed to appropriate items. Declawing can also lead to litter box or aggression problems. However, if you feel that you must either declaw your cat or give her up, we would rather see your cat stay in her home and be your lifelong companion. If you do decide to have your cat declawed, we suggest that you have the surgery done at the same time she's spayed (or neutered, if your cat is a male). Never have rear paws declawed, and be sure to always keep your cat indoors; without claws to defend herself or climb to escape, your cat is in much greater danger outdoors—and the great outdoors is a very unsafe place for cats to begin with.

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BEHAVIOR
SERIES

Cat Aggression toward People

CAT CAREGIVERS SOMETIMES HAVE DIFFICULTY understanding why their cats, who seem friendly and content one minute, may suddenly bite and scratch them the next. Aggressive behaviors are part of the normal behavioral patterns of almost any animal species. Aggressive cats can be dangerous, so attempting to resolve a chronic cat aggression problem often requires assistance from a professional who is knowledgeable about cat behavior.

Types of Aggression

Play Aggression

Play-motivated aggressive behaviors are commonly observed in young, active cats less than two years of age and who live in one-cat households. Play in cats incorporates a variety of behaviors such as exploratory, investigative, and predatory behaviors. Play provides young cats with opportunities to practice skills they would normally need for survival. For example, kittens like to explore new areas and investigate anything that moves. They may bat at, pounce on, and bite objects which to them resemble prey.

Aggressive behaviors can be identified as play based on the types of situations in which they occur, the cat's body postures, and the types of behaviors displayed. Playful aggression often results in scratches and inhibited bites which do not break the skin. Playful attacks often occur when an unsuspecting owner comes down the stairs, steps out of the bathtub, rounds a corner, or even moves under the bedcovers. Play which involves aggression can be initiated by the owner or by the cat. Owners may inadvertently contribute to this problem if they encourage kittens to chase or bite at their hands and feet during play.

The body postures seen during play aggression resemble the postures a cat would show when searching for or catching prey. The cat may freeze in a low crouch before pouncing, twitch her tail, flick her ears back and forth, or wrap her front feet around a person's hands or feet while biting. Most play aggression can be successfully redirected to appropriate targets. For more information on rough play in cats, please see "Managing Your Kitten's Rough Play."

"Don't Pet Me Anymore" Aggression

It is not uncommon for cats to "suddenly" bite while being petted. This behavior is not well understood, even by experienced animal behaviorists. For whatever reason, petting which the cat was previously enjoying becomes unpleasant. The bite is the cat's signal that she has had enough petting. Cats vary in how much they will tolerate being petted or held. People often describe cats as biting "out of the blue" or without warning; however, their signals may be very subtle and hard to detect. You should become more aware of your cat's body postures and cease petting or stop any other kind of interaction before the bite occurs. Signals to watch for include:

- Restlessness
- Tail twitching

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- Ears turning back or flicking back and forth
- Turning or moving her head toward your hand

When you observe any of these signals, it is time to stop petting your cat immediately and allow her to sit quietly on your lap or go her own way. Any physical punishment almost always makes the problem worse, as it makes the cat more likely to bite either because she is fearful or because petting becomes even more unpleasant if it is associated with punishment.

If you want to try to prolong the amount of time your cat will tolerate petting, use some food rewards. Before your cat shows any of the behaviors described above, offer her a special tidbit of food such as a tiny piece of tuna or boiled chicken. At the same time, decrease the intensity of your petting. Continue to lightly pet your cat for a short time period while offering her tidbits. In this way, petting will come to be associated with more pleasant things, and she may enjoy petting for longer time periods. Each time you work with your cat, try to pet her for slightly longer time periods using the food. If you stop petting her when she is aggressive, her behavior has succeeded. She has learned that her aggressive behavior will get her what she wants—the petting stops. Thus, it is important to watch her body language carefully and stop petting before she becomes aggressive.

Fearful/Defensive Aggression

Fearful cats may display body postures that appear similar to canine submissive postures—crouching on the floor, ears back, tail tucked, and possibly rolling slightly to the side. Cats in this posture are not submissive; they are fearful and defensive and may attack if touched. See “Reducing Your Cat’s Fearful Behavior” for more information on fearful behavior in cats.

Related topics at www.petsforlife.org

- Managing Your Kitten’s Rough Play
- Reducing Your Cat’s Fearful Behavior

Redirected Aggression

Redirected aggression occurs when the cat is aroused by one person or animal, but then redirects this aggression toward another person or animal. For example, if two family cats have a spat, the losing cat, still aroused, may walk up and attack the family child.

Territorial aggression is not commonly directed at people. Usually cats only feel the need to defend their territory from other cats. (Cats are highly territorial, even more so than dogs.)

What to Do

- Check first with your veterinarian to rule out medical causes for the aggressive behavior.
- Seek professional help. An aggression problem will not go away by itself. Working with aggression problems requires in-home help from an animal-behavior specialist.
- Take precautions. Your first priority is to keep everyone safe. Supervise, confine, or restrict your cat’s activities until you can obtain professional help. You are liable for any injuries caused by your cat’s behavior.

What Not to Do

- You should never attempt to handle a fearful or aggressive cat. Cat bites and scratches become infected easily. If you do receive an injury from your cat, clean the wound carefully and contact your physician.
- Punishment will not help and will even make the problem worse. If the aggression is motivated by fear, punishment will make the cat more fearful, and therefore more aggressive.

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BEHAVIOR
SERIES

Your Pregnancy and Your Cat

DON'T FALL PREY TO MYTH AND MISINFORMATION!
Being pregnant doesn't mean you have to give up caring for your cat. Learn the real scoop on pregnancy, cat litter boxes, and toxoplasmosis—and the simple steps you can take to reduce the risk.

And Baby Makes Three

Congratulations, you're expecting a baby! You've probably heard of toxoplasmosis because it can cause serious birth defects. A woman who acquires toxoplasmosis during pregnancy can transmit the infection to her unborn child. It is this infection in utero which causes fear among cat owners as congenital toxoplasmosis infection can lead to miscarriage or an array of malformations at birth. Many pregnant women will try to lower their risk of acquiring toxoplasmosis by abandoning their cats.

However, toxoplasmosis is a rare disease in countries like ours and is one that can easily be avoided. Cats acquire toxoplasmosis from eating contaminated raw meat, birds, mice, or soil. While cats are the only species of animal to shed the infectious stage in their feces, other animals can disseminate toxoplasmosis if their infected meat is eaten without proper cooking.

Fortunately, cat ownership does not necessarily increase the risk of acquiring toxoplasmosis. An understanding of the life cycle of *Toxoplasma gondii* (*T. gondii*) and the role that cats play in disease transmission can allay fears of transmitting congenital toxoplasmosis. Cats should continue to be sources of joy and companionship to their owners during pregnancy and following the birth of a child.

Life Cycle

T. gondii is a protozoan organism that can infect all mammals, who serve as an intermediate host. The cat is the only animal who can support both sexual and asexual reproduction of *T. gondii*, and thus plays a crucial role in the organism's life cycle.

T. gondii exists primarily in three forms. Oocysts develop as a result of sexual reproduction, which occurs in the small intestine of a cat who has consumed tissue cysts containing *T. gondii*. These infectious oocysts are produced for approximately two weeks after a cat first acquires the infection, which usually occurs in a kitten who hunts outdoors. Once a cat has been infected with toxoplasmosis, she acquires immunity and only rarely can be reinfected. Therefore, only during her first exposure to *T. gondii* does a cat excrete potentially infectious oocysts. In addition, oocysts are not immediately infective and require an incubation period of one to five days to become infective.

Humans acquire toxoplasmosis by one of three mechanisms. Most commonly, undercooked meat which contains *T. gondii* within tissue cysts is consumed. Direct ingestion of infective oocysts is a less common method of acquisition and is unlikely to occur from

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direct cat contact. Transplacental transmission may occur when a mother acquires a primary infection while pregnant.

Why Are Cats Unlikely to Directly Transmit Toxoplasmosis?

Cats are unlikely to directly transmit toxoplasmosis to their owners for a number of reasons. First of all, only cats who ingest tissue cysts acquire infection. To the feline population, this includes outdoor cats who hunt and eat uncooked mice and other rodents, as well as cats who are fed raw meat by their owners as a treat. In addition, only after a cat is first exposed to *T. gondii* does she excrete oocysts, and she does so for only two weeks. An outdoor hunting cat is often exposed as a kitten and is less likely to transmit infection as he ages. Therefore, based on odds alone, the risk of direct contact with a cat who is excreting oocysts is rare.

Secondly, oocysts are not immediately infectious and require one to five days to become infective. Therefore, if the litter is changed daily, exposure to infective oocysts is unlikely to occur.

Finally, since oocysts are transmitted by ingestion, an owner must make contact with contaminated feces in the litter box and then, without adequately washing her hands, touch her mouth.

How Should a Cat Owner Lower the Risk of Toxoplasmosis?

Based on an understanding of the life cycle of *T. gondii* and the role cats play in disease transmission, the following are general recommendations that cat owners expecting a child can follow:

- Wear gloves when working in soil. If gloves are not worn, hands need to be washed thoroughly following soil contact.

- Wash all uncooked vegetables thoroughly.
- Indoor cats eating only prepackaged food do not acquire toxoplasmosis, and the litter box, therefore, is not a source of infection.
- Outdoor cats or indoor cats eating uncooked meat can acquire toxoplasmosis. In this situation, pregnant women should avoid changing the litter or do so only with rubber gloves.
- Change the litter on a daily basis.
- Do NOT get rid of your cat.

How Is Congenital Toxoplasmosis Diagnosed?

Congenital toxoplasmosis is rare, occurring in approximately 3,000 newborns per year in the United States. Even with primary infection, not all mothers will transmit the infection in utero. Infectivity increases over the course of pregnancy, with transmission rates of 15 percent, 30 percent, and 60 percent in the first, second, and third trimesters, respectively. However, the risk of severe congenital malformations is higher earlier in pregnancy.

Toxoplasmosis in the mother can be treated effectively with antibiotics, and additional antibiotics can be given to treat the fetus if congenital infection is documented.

Conclusion

Cat ownership has many benefits that are immeasurable in terms of companionship and love. While cats play an integral role in the life cycle of *T. gondii*, they are unlikely to directly transmit infection to their owners and can safely remain as a loved member of the family when you're expecting a new child.

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Related topics at www.petsforlife.org

- Preparing Pets for a New Baby

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