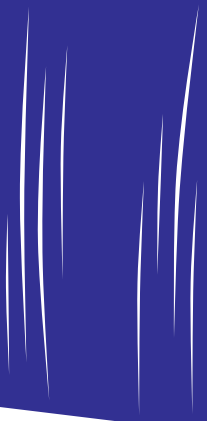


Spraying and scratching



CATS PROTECTION
VETERINARY GUIDES



Spraying urine and scratching are normal behaviours and can be performed by any cat, whether they are male or female, neutered or entire. However, the occurrence of these behaviours indoors can be very unpleasant for you and can indicate that your cat does not feel secure in his surroundings.

Spraying

Urine spraying is a completely different behaviour from normal toileting. When a cat goes to the toilet to rid the body of waste products, he will generally urinate from a squatting position and usually produce a large puddle of urine in a private or secluded area. In contrast, cats spray urine in order to leave a specific 'scent message'. When they spray, they back up to a vertical surface, in an open location, and squirt a short burst of urine onto this surface from a standing position.

Why does my cat spray urine?

Spraying urine is a normal part of scent marking behaviour. Cats use scent to identify different areas in their territory; this provides them with a 'scent map' of their environment as they move around. For example, cats tend to rub their cheeks in the 'core' part of their territory where they feel safe and relaxed. In contrast, they spray urine to indicate those areas of their territory where they feel threatened. It is thought that the scent deposited acts as a 'reminder' for the cat to be wary in that part of his territory. When the smell begins to fade the cat will re-spray to top it up.

Why is my cat spraying urine indoors?

Cats may spray indoors when they are;

- ill
- highly aroused
- stressed by a perceived threat
- stressed by changes in the household, eg the arrival of a new baby or building work being carried out
- threatened by other cats coming into the household or by cats in the surrounding neighbourhood

In many cases there is a combination of factors that have led your cat to spray urine and, in some cases, the behaviour can start for one reason, and develop or change for others. For example, many owners punish their cat for spraying in the house, which tends to make the cat more anxious and, therefore, more likely to spray.

What can I do if my cat sprays indoors?

If your cat has suddenly started spraying indoors you should visit your vet to ensure that there is no underlying medical cause for the behaviour. If the vet deems your cat healthy, the next stage is to find out what the perceived threat is for the cat and then take action to stop it. This process can be quite complicated, as there are often many factors involved, so for established cases it is best to ask your vet to refer you to a qualified clinical behaviourist.

Sometimes, the onset of spraying behaviour can be more easily linked to a specific change in the environment. For example, the addition of a new cat to the household can threaten resident cats and induce spraying. Clues about why your cat has started spraying can be ascertained from the location of the marks, because these will be left specifically where he feels anxious.

If he is spraying on internal doorways and in hallways it may be because this is where he comes into close contact with other cats in the household. To overcome this, you will need to prevent conflict and create a sense of security. Providing extra places for your cats to eat, drink, sleep, play, toilet and scratch may decrease the need for competition.

If your cats have to walk past each other in the home, you can put up shelving or arrange furniture so they can pass each other at different levels, without direct contact.

What can I do if my cat sprays on doors and windows?

If your cat is spraying on the cat flap, external doors or windows then it is likely that something outside is worrying him. This may, for example, be other cats he can see through windows. In this case, making the inside environment feel more secure for him can be helpful. Covering the windows with a semi-transparent material to restrict his view of other cats outside may help increase his feeling of security inside. If other cats are entering the house through your cat flap, fitting a cat flap that works with a magnetic or electronic device attached to a safety collar can help.

Redecorating, changing furniture or moving house replaces familiar smells that comfort your cat. To prevent him from becoming anxious at unfamiliar scents, it is a good idea to introduce him to a new environment or house gradually. When moving into a new house, settling your cat in one room with items familiar to him, and then gradually allowing increased access to other areas, will help decrease his anxiety. For more information see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Moving home*

Never punish for spraying

Although spraying urine can be an unpleasant and distressing problem, you should never punish your cat. He is spraying urine because he feels anxious; punishing him will only make him more anxious, and therefore more likely to spray. The best thing you can do is to identify what is worrying your cat and address it.

How do I clean urine spray?

Once a cat has sprayed, if the area is not cleaned properly, his sensitive nose will draw him back to spray the same area again in an attempt to top up the faded scent. Many household cleaning products contain ammonia, which is found in cat urine, so using these can make the problem worse.

A cheap and efficient cleaning method is to wash sprayed sites thoroughly with a warm, 10 per cent solution of biological washing powder and then rinse with clean water and allow to dry. If the surface is suitable, surgical spirit can be applied after cleaning to remove all lingering traces of urine. It is worth doing a small patch test first to ensure this cleaning regime will not cause damage.

Carpet is extremely absorbent and the urine often soaks into the underlay and the flooring underneath. If the area is badly soiled over a long period it may be necessary to cut out the section of carpet and underlay and treat the concrete or floorboards underneath.

What is pheromone therapy?

In addition to cleaning, you can buy a synthetic version of your cat's facial pheromones from your vet. Cats naturally deposit these pheromones from glands on their faces when rubbing objects such as the corners of walls or furniture and they can help to make your cat feel more relaxed. This artificial form will only be effective after the reason for your cat's anxiety has been identified and dealt with. The pheromone can be supplied as a plug-in diffuser or spray.



Scratching

Cats scratch for two reasons; to keep their claws in good condition and as a communication signal. Scent glands in between the pads of the paws produce a unique smell which is deposited on the surface that the claws are dragged down. This scent, combined with the visual signal of the scratch marks and discarded claw husks, leaves a message for the cat himself, as well as others.

Why is my cat scratching indoors?

If your cat has limited or no access to the outdoors, either through his own choice or yours, he will have to maintain good claw condition inside the house. If this is the reason your cat is scratching indoors, he will find one or two suitable scratching sites and continue to use them, whether this is a cat scratching post or the back of your settee!

If the scratched areas are widespread throughout your home and in areas of conflict like doorways and windows, it is likely that your cat is scratching for communicative reasons and feels insecure in these areas. Similarly to spraying, the most common reason for scratching indoors appears to be the presence of another cat.

Just as with spraying, the reason for cats to show this behaviour can change over time. If your cat enjoys attention, he might learn that whenever he scratches the furniture you interact with him, so he will carry on scratching.

What can I do if my cat scratches the furniture?

If your cat is scratching furniture or wallpaper to maintain his claws, you should first cover the scratched item with thick plastic sheeting to prevent him from using it. At the same time, obtain an appropriate scratching post and put it next to the area where he scratches. The scratching post should have a heavy base so it does not topple over in use and be tall enough to allow your cat to scratch at full stretch. Once your cat is consistently using the new post, you can gradually move it to a more convenient location and then remove the plastic sheeting from the furniture or wallpaper.

Each cat in a household should have a scratching post. These should be positioned in different locations to prevent conflict. Some posts are impregnated with catnip and placing pieces of food on the post may also help.

Playing with your cat little and often throughout the day and providing toys may help redirect his energy away from scratching.

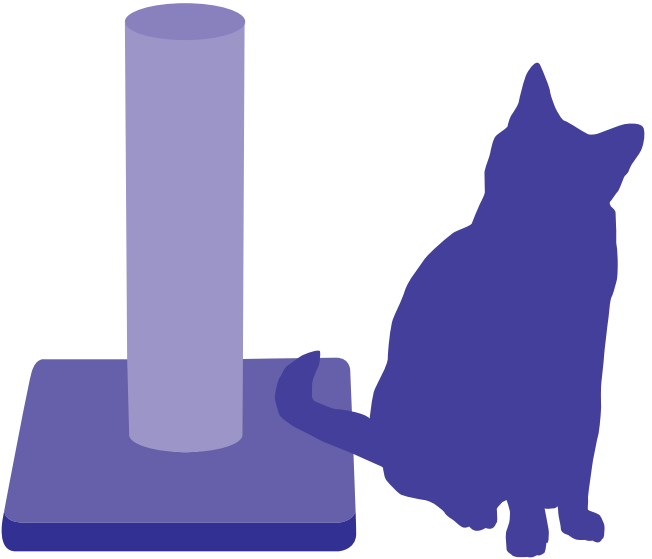
Scratching to mark territory

If your cat is scratching furniture as a marking behaviour, then try to identify what is worrying him in this part of his territory and remedy it (see Spraying). Follow the advice already given, cover the scratched areas with a protective material and place a more appropriate scratching surface next to them. However, to help your cat feel secure in his surroundings again, and to permanently stop him feeling the need to scratch the furniture, you will have to identify and deal with what is worrying him. Don't just provide him with another scratching surface without attending to his feelings of insecurity.

Importance of praise

It is important to remember that cats do not scratch just to be naughty. It is a natural behaviour they should be allowed to exhibit. Shouting when your cat scratches your furniture can lead to an increase in frequency as he becomes more anxious or learns that scratching can be used for attention seeking. Make sure you praise your cat when he claws the scratching post and try not to react if he scratches the furniture.

Spraying and scratching can be cured in many cats using the techniques outlined here. However, in some cases the problem can be complex, with a number of factors contributing to the problem. For such cases it is advisable to discuss the problem with your vet, who can refer you to a qualified feline behaviourist.



This leaflet is one of a range provided by Cats Protection on issues surrounding cat care.

Cats Protection is the UK's leading feline welfare charity and helps more than 193,000 cats and kittens each year. We rely entirely on public generosity to finance this vital welfare work.

For more information on **adopting a cat**, **volunteering for us** or **making a donation**, visit **www.cats.org.uk**



Cats Protection, National Cat Centre,
Chelwood Gate, Nr Haywards Heath RH17 7TT

Helpline: 03000 12 12 12 Email: cp@cats.org.uk
Web: www.cats.org.uk VET06-2009 **CODE: 4078**

Reg Charity 203644 (England and Wales) and SC037711 (Scotland)