

Ask the vets+++

Have you got a question?

Send your questions to:

Ask The Vets, The Cat magazine, National Cat Centre,
Chelwood Gate, Haywards Heath, RH17 7TT or email
editorial@cats.org.uk

CP's team of veterinary experts tackle your feline-related questions...



Q I have three cats who all seem to have food fads, not ones you would normally associate with cats. My Havana Dido loves fruit cake and totally destroyed a birthday cake I had stored, overnight. The chocolate point, Calypso loves blue cheese and my oriental Black, Loki loves chocolate to the extent that he can smell chocolate Horlicks from two rooms and a corridor away. He has even broken into a new box of chocolates, Christmas paper, sealing cellophane, cardboard box and all.

I know that chocolate is very bad for cats and do make sure there isn't any he can get at, he just mugs me if I have some, likewise Dido and the fruit cake.

I am correct in thinking these human foods are dangerous for cats?

Is there anything else I must keep away from them? They do turn out wastepaper baskets and my fear is that visitors have put something harmful in them, although I try hard to avoid anything other than paper in the bins.

Incidentally, Calypso is extremely nervous, as Siamese I have had before sometimes are. She hides in the back of the settee when we have visitors, refuses to have anything to do with my husband and overgrooms when anxious, so that she removes hair from her limbs. Her litter sister is not at all nervous and they came from a very reliable breeder. Perhaps it's just silly Siamese behaviour

Moira Byast, Hempton, North Oxfordshire

A What a strange variety of foods your cats are interested in! Among a number of other food stuffs, chocolate, grapes and raisins are toxic to cats and these should not be allowed to be consumed as they can potentially be extremely detrimental to their health. Calypso's love of blue cheese, although not necessarily dangerous, may cause stomach upsets and wouldn't be something we would recommend as a treat.

With regards to your question over what may be hazardous to your cats, because cats can be quite inquisitive, some more than others, it is best to follow the rule: *if you should keep it out of reach of children, keep it out of reach of cats*. This would include household plants, chemicals, anything small they could swallow and human foodstuffs. Also, if they get any substances on their fur or feet they will lick it off, which can be another way of ingesting dangerous substances, so always ensure any potential hazards are locked away and if you wash your floors or other surfaces, rinse well and allow to dry before the cats walk on them.

We would always recommend that if you are concerned that your cats have eaten anything toxic or dangerous

that you should speak to your vet as soon as possible for guidance.

We have leaflets available from our website which hopefully will give you more information on how you can give Dido, Calypso and Loki a safer home and how to enrich their environment. www.cats.org.uk/cat-care/care-leaflets/essential-guides Look for *Keeping your cat safe* and *Indoor and outdoor cats*.

Finally, you mentioned that Calypso overgrooms, have you spoken to your vet about this behaviour, to rule out any potential medical reasons? Cats can overgroom as a result of anxiety, but very often there is also an underlying skin disorder which may be aggravated by stress and anxiety. If it is felt that there is a behavioural component then it may be beneficial to seek the advice of a suitably qualified pet behaviourist, who would come to your house and assist in trying to understand what is making her anxious and help to provide an appropriate behaviour modification programme. Our leaflet *Managing your cat's behaviour* can be found at the same web address as above. Your vet may be able to recommend a local behaviourist or alternatively the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (APBC), have a list of behaviourists who will take referrals from your vet, as well as various publications which may also be of interest – www.apbc.org.uk

Q My partner and I have recently adopted a cat from your centre in Ryde. He is a black-and-white Norwegian Forest cat, three years old and goes by the name of Boris.

We don't know too much about his background other than he was a stray and that he was very, very needy at the centre. Our problem with him is that he wants constant attention at night time and pads constantly. We have no way of shutting him down stairs at night and we don't have a cat flap for him to come and go as he pleases. We tried shutting our bedroom door but he miaows outside until we let him in. He is a very loving cat and has settled in very well to his new home but we were wondering if there is any solution to the constant padding and neediness?

Alice and Stephen, Isle of Wight

A We're sorry to hear that you're getting disturbed sleep, it's not fun! Even though your cat doesn't seem unwell, they are masters at disguising illness. When cats show a change in behaviour, the first thing we always recommend is that you get your cat checked out by your vet. Please ensure to specifically discuss his recent night time activities with the vet to rule out any medical problems that

could be causing this behaviour. Once he's been checked out by a vet, there are a number of possible behavioural causes. For example, cats are crepuscular – meaning that they are naturally more active during dawn and dusk. With the increasing day length, this can affect your cat's activity levels. Does your cat seem to want something in particular such as food or attention? If so, try to give him options to meet his needs himself. If he is bugging you for food and the vet doesn't feel there is a medical reason for this, then try feeding him his daily allowance little and often throughout the day and leave a portion down at night too. To keep him amused, you could try hiding some dry food in cardboard egg boxes so that he has to paw out the biscuits and 'hunt' for his food. Always 'show' the cat how to use new feeding enrichment ideas so that they can easily get the hang of it and prevent them losing interest or getting frustrated. You could try making a toilet roll pyramid where you sellotape the tubes together and hide dry food in the tubes. Check that the circumference of the tubes is big enough to fit his paws! There are also commercially available items such as food balls whereby the dry food falls out of the holes when it is moved, and puzzle boards. If he's after attention, remember that giving him any kind of attention (whether it's nice attention or not) is going to reinforce the behaviour, so that he's more likely to show the behaviour again next time he wants attention. If this is the underlying cause then it's best to ignore him when he's doing this at night, but please give him fuss during the day when it's appropriate. If you can give him regular fuss and play sessions through the day, this can help him predict when he is going to get attention.

There are many possible reasons that could cause this behaviour, and these are just a few ideas. Cats Protection can only give general advice and information on the care of cats. Therefore, for specific guidance and help with your cat, we would highly recommend that you consult your own vet who may recommend a referral to a suitably qualified behaviourist or alternatively go to the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (APBC) website www.apbc.org.uk to find your nearest qualified behaviourist.

Q My poor cat was involved in a car accident some time ago and although he was saved by the vet he has been left with no control over his bowel movements. Consequently he urinates and defecates in my house and often walks around with faeces stuck to his tail – he doesn't seem to have the wherewithal to clean himself now. Do you have any advice you could give us please?

Jane Burton, London

A Unfortunately if the road accident causes injury to the nerves at the base of the tail that supply the bladder and anal sphincter, the cat is often left with incontinence. This can improve over time but in general if there has been no major change within one to two months after the accident this is likely to be a permanent situation.

In some circumstances owners can be trained to express the cat's bladder twice a day which reduces the incidence of urinary incontinence as it is usually an overflow incontinence. Using a high quality diet in some cases will also improve stool consistency and reduce the incidence of soiling to the tail.

A reduction in grooming behaviour may also indicate the cat is in pain. Arthritis is common in older cats and cats that have had a traumatic injury are even more susceptible so the introduction of an anti-inflammatory may improve the cat's grooming behaviour.

We would strongly advise that you speak to your vet as only they will be in a position to assess the cat's prognosis and provide advice specific to this cat's case.

THE EXPERTS



Maggie Roberts BVM&S MRCVS

After qualifying at Edinburgh University in 1986, Maggie went on to work primarily in private practice. Maggie first worked for CP as Veterinary Officer from 1997-99; her interest in feline medicine brought her back to the charity as Director of Veterinary Services in 2006. She has three cats, Trevor, Frankie and Ronnie.



Beth Skillings BVSc MRCVS

Beth qualified at the University of Liverpool in 1998 and went on to work in general veterinary practice until 2005 when she joined CP as Head of Veterinary Services. Beth moved into a new role as Clinical Veterinary Officer in November 2006. Beth has a CP cat, Humphrey.



Lisa Morrow BMLSc, DVM, MSc (Vet Epi) MRCVS

Lisa graduated from the Ontario Veterinary College at the University of Guelph, Canada in 2000. Lisa first worked with CP as an Adoption Centre Vet at Derby Adoption Centre and was CP Head of Veterinary Services from 2003-2005. Lisa recently rejoined CP as Field Veterinary Officer in the northern region of the UK. She has two black cats, Kiwi and Mango.



Karen Hiestand BVSc MRCVS

Karen graduated from Massey University in New Zealand in 2001 and spent two years in mixed practice in her home country. Since then, she has interspersed locum work around the UK with volunteer veterinary work. Karen is the Field Veterinary Officer for the southern region of the UK. She has one cat called Dexter.

Our veterinary surgeons have provided the advice on these pages, but for specific cases and health concerns it is important that you consult your own vet who will be able to look at your cat's history and do a clinical examination.