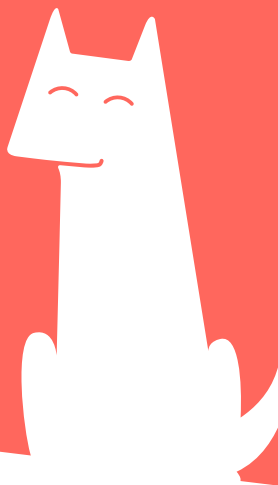


Managing your cat's behaviour



CATS PROTECTION
ESSENTIAL GUIDE 10



Ain't misbehaving

Cats which are nervous, aggressive or act in what we consider is an inappropriate way – such as spraying indoors – behave that way for a reason. These 'misbehaviours' are usually signs that something – from the cat's perspective, at least – is very wrong. Punishing your cat will only make matters worse. It often helps to consider the cat's normal behaviour, needs and motivations – see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Understanding your cat's behaviour*. Also don't forget that owners and carers of cats have a legal duty of care to ensure their needs are met, which includes their need to exhibit normal behaviour patterns.

If your cat starts to do something that is out of character, the first thing you should always do is book them in for a health check with your vet to rule out any medical problems that could cause this behaviour. Medical disorders are very common causes of behavioural issues, even if the link is not immediately apparent. Always discuss the cat's behaviour and all your observations and concerns with the vet.

Signs of pain

Cats are very subtle when it comes to showing pain and they will do their best to hide it. They are more likely to show slight changes in lifestyle or behaviour than they are to show a limp, for example. There are many different medical problems that cause discomfort and varying intensities of pain. Keep a close eye on your cat and if you notice any change in their behaviour, take them to the vets for a health check. Treating pain can really improve their quality of life.

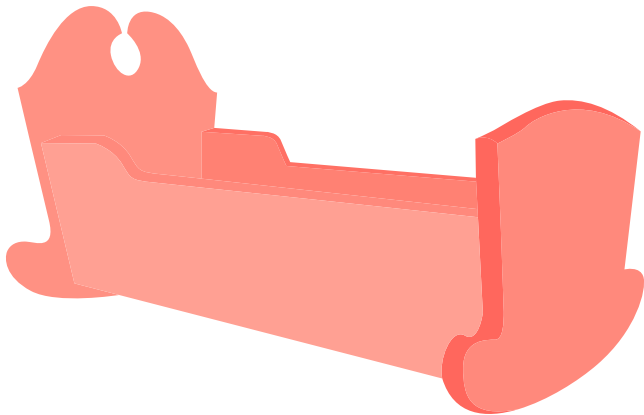
Signs of pain include:

- becoming more withdrawn or hiding more than usual
- sleeping more than usual, especially in one place, or slowing down
- becoming less tolerant of people, or being handled
- aggressive behaviour
- hesitating or becoming more reluctant to jump up or down from furniture for example, or go through the cat flap
- being stiff after resting, or showing a preference for using a particular leg when going up and down stairs
- crouching in a hunched up position with squinty eyes
- playing less, or reduced interaction with an owner
- reduced eating or drinking
- increased anxiety or fear
- sleep disturbance
- pacing, circling or restlessness
- a scruffy or matted coat, particularly in hard to reach areas
- vocalisation, especially when moving or using the litter tray
- not using the litter tray
- over-grooming
- some cats will purr when in pain

Signs of stress

Cats express signs of stress in a subtle way making it very difficult to tell when a cat is stressed. There are many reasons why it can occur. Stress as an immediate response to a threat is healthy as it enables the cat's 'flight or fight' response and allows them to get away quickly. However, ongoing stress can be harmful for your cat's wellbeing.

A few reasons cats get stressed include moving house or a change in routine such as redecorating or getting new furniture. It can also occur if the litter tray and food bowls are in unsuitable locations, or there aren't enough. Unfamiliar people visiting the house and the introduction of a new pet, baby or child partner can be a trigger. A cat may be bullied or intimidated by neighbouring cats or even the other resident cats they live with.



Signs to look out for include:

- becoming more withdrawn or hiding more than usual
- appear to be sleeping more, some cats will actually pretend to be asleep while trying to monitor the cause of the stress
- becoming less tolerant around people or being handled
- hesitating or becoming more reluctant to use important resources such as window sills, furniture or your lap, using the litter tray or going through the cat flap
- crouching in a hunched up position with squinty eyes, some cats will cringe away from you if you try to approach
- a reduction in play behaviour and interaction with owners
- eating or drinking less
- overeating
- increased anxiety or fear
- sleep disturbance
- pacing, circling or restlessness
- a scruffy or matted coat
- house soiling
- over-grooming

Many of the signs listed for pain and stress could also be due to many other medical conditions or behavioural problems.

Always see your vet if you notice any changes in your cat.

Shy, nervous or timid cats

While most cats settle into new homes quickly, some remain fearful despite a gentle welcome and time to settle in. Don't be too disappointed if your shy or timid cat tries run away and hide from you. Showing patience and sensitivity will go a long way to ensure that you have a happy and extremely rewarding relationship with your cat.

Why is my cat so timid?

Timid behaviour could be due to:

genetics – an inherited tendency. Some cats are naturally more anxious than others

poor socialisation – a lack of contact with humans, particularly during their first eight weeks of life. If young kittens are not properly socialised with people, they will be frightened or stressed by human contact

bad experiences – a previous frightening experience that has made the cat fearful

What are the signs of shyness, nervousness or timidity?

As cats cannot tell us how they feel, it can be difficult to recognise that your cat wants you to move away. Signs of fear include running away and retreating to hiding places. A scared cat will show dilated pupils and/or flattened ears and will cringe and cower from you.

This fear can develop into aggressive behaviour – where your cat adopts 'fight' as a tactic instead of 'flight' as a last resort. Usually aggression develops because the cat feels cornered or trapped, or because they have previously learned that flight is unsuccessful. Avoid putting your cat into this situation and ensure they can always get away easily if they want to.

Managing shy cats

There are a number of things you can do to make your timid cat feel more secure. As long as your cat had some positive contact with people when they were a young kitten, with patience your cat will learn not to be afraid but you must take things slowly. It helps to:

- provide plenty of refuges for your cat around the house. Cats de-stress quicker if they can hide, preferably in high and dark locations eg behind sofas and under beds. A cardboard box on its side or blankets placed on shelves or wardrobes can help your cat feel safe
- ensure other neighbouring cats cannot enter the house through the cat flap or open windows. Be vigilant to make sure your cat is not being bullied in the garden or intimidated by other cats through the windows, conservatory or patio doors
- keep all your daily routines consistent where possible. This provides a predictable, reassuring environment for your cat
- use synthetic scent pheromones – these can create a reassuring environment for the cat and may help to reduce stress – they are available from your vet
- sit quietly in your cat's vicinity to allow them to get used to you in their own time. Ignore them while you read a book or take a nap so that they don't feel pressurised or anxious about your presence. Do it while they are eating or provide a small treat so they associate your presence with something positive. The time you spend near them can very gradually be built up as they adjust
- let your cat make the first move – direct approaches are extremely threatening so don't force attention on your cat

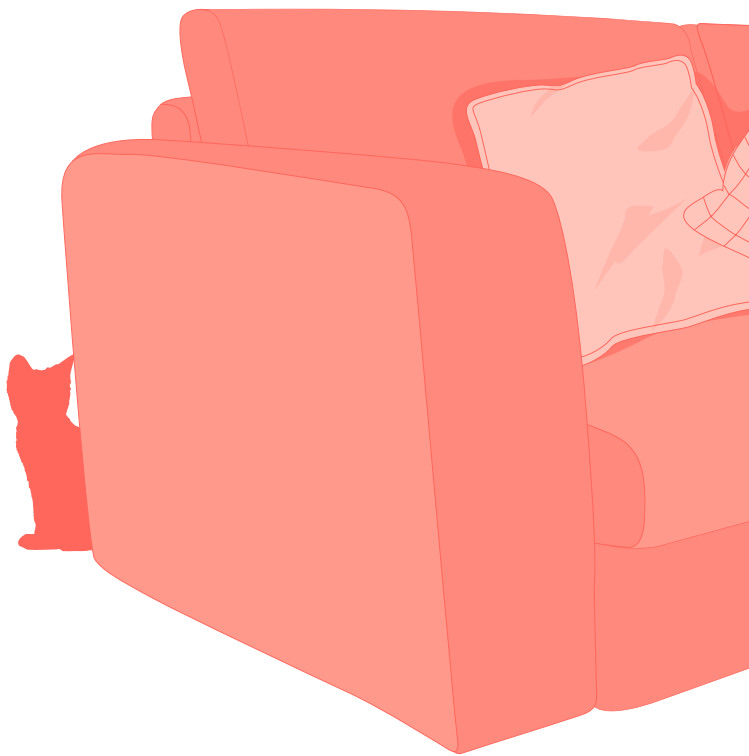
- blink slowly at your cat, narrow your eyes so they are half open and then turn your face away slowly to reassure your cat that you are not a threat

As your cat becomes braver, try:

- talking to your cat quietly in a calming tone – it is a great way to bond
- rewarding your cat with a treat when they approach you – at first, give the treat as soon as your cat approaches but gradually increase the time between the approach and the treat. Over a period of weeks, work up to being able to calmly stroke your cat once or twice before giving the treat
- using small toys you can gently throw for them, such as ball of foil, scrunched up paper or ping pong ball. Fishing rod toys allow the cat to interact without them feeling threatened by close contact

Most importantly, never lose your temper or try to force your cat to interact too quickly as this will just reinforce their previous fears. Build on your successes gradually – eventually your cat will learn to trust you and will much happier. In some cases, you may find guidance from your vet or a suitably qualified behaviourist useful.

Overcoming a cat's shyness through patient handling and care often leads to an extremely rewarding and close relationship between owner and cat and is well worth the extra time and effort.



Aggressive cats

Cats are rarely aggressive towards humans but like all of us, they do have their limits. There are many different reasons for aggressive behaviour and sometimes it can be a combination of causes. Here are just a few examples:

Defensive/fear aggression – your cat will usually run from a perceived threat but may defend themselves if they can't escape, or has previously learned that fleeing is unsuccessful.

Play and petting aggression – cats generally prefer to have short but frequent interactions, which is normal in feline social etiquette. In contrast, people tend to interact less often but with more intensity. This can be a bit much for some cats and many have a limit when it comes to petting.

Territorial aggression – usually occurs when two cats meet on disputed ground, or when one cat is passing through another cat's territory.

Pain-induced aggression – a cat suffering from pain will have drastically reduced tolerance levels and this is a very common reason for aggression.

Cats may be more inclined to show aggressive behaviour if they are:

- kept indoors without stimulation, access to essential resources or an outlet for their hunting instinct
- young
- misunderstood by their owner
- not neutered – see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Neutering – family planning for felines* for more information



If your cat is aggressive, particularly if it is newly-developed aggression, seek advice from your vet immediately. If there is no medical reason causing the aggression, then ask your vet for a referral to a suitably qualified behaviourist.

If you have any bites or scratches that break the skin, then clean the wound carefully and seek medical attention.

Spraying and house soiling

Spraying – cats sometimes spray short bursts of urine on vertical objects outside to mark territory and leave information for themselves or other cats to 'read'. If your cat starts to spray inside the home, then it is almost certainly a sign that all is not right in their world.

Urine spraying is a normal behaviour and can be performed by any cat, whether they are male or female, neutered or not. However, if your cat starts spraying indoors, it can indicate that they do not feel secure in their surroundings.

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

Why does my cat urine spray?

Urine spraying 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 use urine spray to mark areas of their territory where they feel threatened. It is thought that the scent deposited acts as a 'reminder to self' for the cat to be wary in that part of his or her territory. When the smell begins to fade, the cat will re-spray to top it up.

Why is my cat urine spraying indoors?

Cats may spray indoors when they are:

- ill
- stressed by a perceived threat
- stressed by changes in the household eg new baby or building work
- threatened by other cats coming into the household, or by cats in the surrounding neighbourhood – this is the most common reason

Often there is a combination of factors that have led to the development of urine spraying. In some cases, the behaviour can start for one reason and develop or change due to other causes. For example, many owners punish their cat for spraying in the house – this tends to make the cat more anxious and more likely to spray. The best thing you can do is identify what is worrying your cat and address it.

What can I do if my cat sprays indoors?

If your cat has suddenly started spraying indoors, you should take your cat to have a health check with your vet to ensure there is no underlying medical cause for the behaviour. If the vet deems your cat is healthy, the next stage is to find out what the cat finds threatening and then take action to stop it. This process can be quite complicated, as there are often many factors involved. It is best to ask your vet to refer you to a suitably qualified behaviourist

Sometimes, spraying 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 they feel anxious.

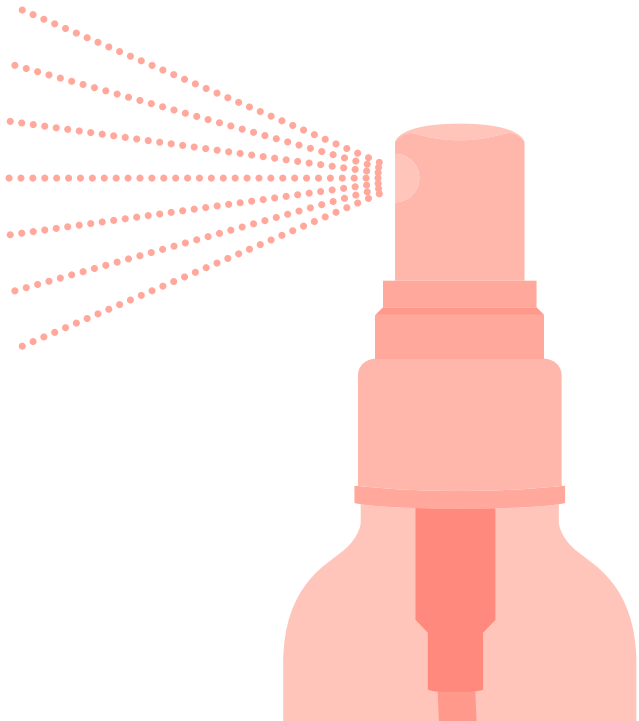
If they are spraying on internal doorways and in hallways it may be because this is where they come into close contact with other cats in the household. To overcome this, you can help to prevent conflict and create a sense of security by providing extra litter trays, bowls and places for your cats to sleep, play and scratch – reducing the need for competition. If your cats have to walk past each other because of the layout of your house, 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 usually because something outside is worrying them – for example other cats they can see through windows. In this case, making the inside environment feel more secure for them is often helpful. Covering the windows with a semi-transparent material to restrict their view of other cats outside may help. If other cats are entering the house through your cat flap, you can fit a microchip cat flap that reads your cat's unique microchip, or a magnetic cat flap – where a magnet is attached to a safety collar. You could also try to discourage the neighbouring cats from entering the garden, see humane deterrents for ideas.

The importance of scent

Redecorating, changing furniture or moving house removes familiar smells that comfort your cat. To prevent your cat from becoming anxious at unfamiliar scents, it is a good idea to introduce them to a new environment or house gradually. When moving into a new house, keeping your cat in one room with items familiar to them and then gradually allowing access to other areas will help to decrease their anxiety. Also see **What is pheromone therapy?** later.



Inappropriate toileting

Inappropriate toileting is different to spraying behaviour and can occur for completely different reasons. If your cat is toileting away from the litter tray, there are many different reasons. Always get your cat vet checked before considering any behavioural interventions, as it is very important to rule out medical reasons for the behaviour. Below are some general guidelines that may help, but if you have all these measures in place and the problem persists, it is worth getting a referral to a qualified behaviourist to help identify the causes.

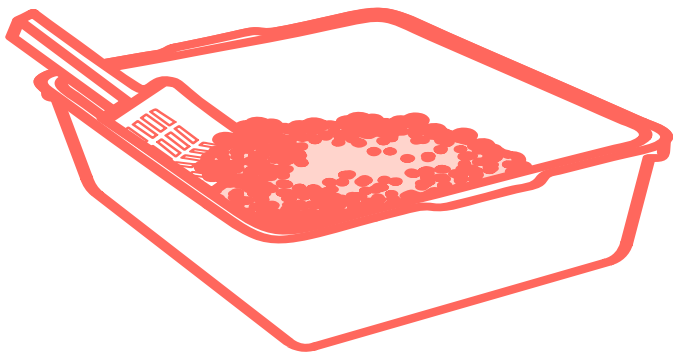
Even if your cat has outside access, always provide litter trays inside. Some cats can feel safer using a tray in the house – there could be neighbourhood cats that intimidate them. Understandably, many cats don't like to go out when it's bad weather, or if the toileting site is frozen over in winter and it's difficult to dig.

Privacy

Toileting is a very vulnerable activity for cats and they will try to choose a quiet, private location for this. If your cat is upset by an incident outside, or near to their litter tray, they may instead find a quiet corner indoors to pass their waste. If the tray is positioned in the open where it may be disturbed, the cat may feel too vulnerable to use it and will seek a safer spot instead. A tray may not be used if it is placed next to a noisy washing machine, or by a cat flap and remember that cats like to toilet away from where they eat and drink. When placing litter trays, put them in quiet, private areas that are away from busy walkways.

Litter tray

There are many different types of litter trays available to suit your cat's needs. As a kitten grows up, they will need a larger, adult-sized tray with enough space to manoeuvre. An elderly cat requires a tray with low sides so they can get in and out more easily. Nervous cats may prefer the privacy of hooded litter trays. Each cat is an individual and what might work for one cat, won't necessarily work for another. As a general rule, provide one litter tray per cat, plus an extra one. If you are experiencing litter tray problems, you may need to add a few extra trays to this rule. Place the trays in a variety of different locations around the home, both upstairs and downstairs, as opposed to placing them next to each other in a row.



Litter

Cats often prefer the litter type they used as a kitten. Many cats have a preference for fine, heavy sand-like litter, which is similar to the material that their ancestors would have used. This feels soft under their paws and enables them to have a good dig. Avoid anything scented as cats have a very sensitive sense of smell – although you might like the fragrance, your cat may not agree! Provide 3cm of litter as this generally seems to be the preferred depth for cats – not too shallow so they can have a good dig in it, but equally they don't like it too deep either.

Cleanliness

Cats are renowned for their fastidiously clean nature so they will not use a dirty litter tray. Remove any deposits once or twice a day if you have a clumping litter and completely clean out the tray once a week. Some cats prefer the deposits to be removed before they will use the tray again, while others prefer one tray for urinating and another for defecating. Hooded litter trays need to be kept extra clean as they can hold the smell inside and be overpowering for your cat's keen sense of smell!

Never punish for spraying or inappropriate toileting

Although urine spraying or inappropriate toileting can be an unpleasant and distressing problem, you should never punish your cat. They are spraying because they feel anxious – punishing them will only make them more likely to spray due to stress. The best thing you can do is to identify what is worrying your cat and address this, starting with a visit to your vet for a health check.

How do I clean urine from affected areas?

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

A cheap and efficient cleaning method is to wash sprayed or soiled sites thoroughly with a warm, 10 per cent solution of biological washing powder and then rinse with clean water and allow the area 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 any 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 before replacing.

Scratching

Scratching is a normal behaviour. 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 reminder signal for the cat and a message for other felines in the area.

Why is my cat scratching indoors?

If your cat has limited or no access to the outdoors – either through their own choice or yours – they will have to maintain good claw condition inside the house. They 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 including areas of conflict like doorways and windows, it is likely that your cat is scratching for communication reasons and feels insecure in these areas. Just like spraying, the most common reason for scratching indoors is the presence of another cat.

The reason for cats to show this behaviour can change over time. If your cat enjoys attention, they might learn that whenever they scratch the furniture you interact with them, so they will carry on scratching.

What can I do if my cat scratches the furniture?

If your cat is scratching furniture or wallpaper to maintain their claws you could:

- protect the scratched item by covering with thick, shiny plastic sheeting as this is unappealing to cats
- at the same time, obtain a suitable scratching post and put it next to the area where they scratch
- choose a scratching post with a heavy base so it doesn't topple over or wobble when in use. It should be tall enough to allow your cat to scratch at full stretch – ensure it has a vertical weave to let them drag their claws downwards
- some cats prefer to scratch horizontally (eg cats that scratch carpets or stairs) or diagonally so provide a scratching mat to meet these needs
- once your cat is consistently using the new post, you can gradually move it to a more convenient location if you wish and then remove the plastic sheeting from the furniture or wallpaper
- cats often like to scratch and stretch after they wake up, so you could try placing the scratch post near your cat's bed

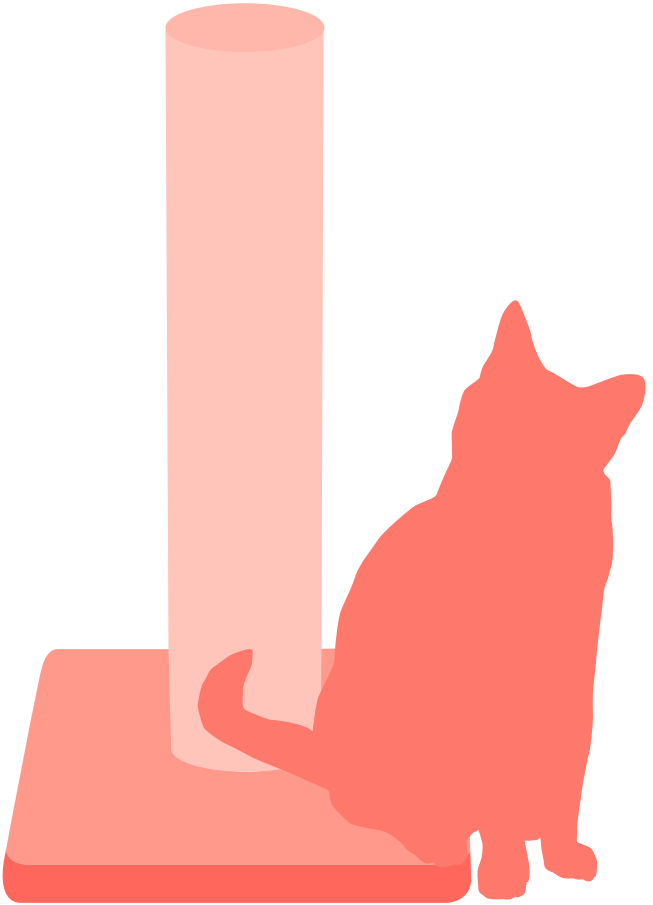
Each cat in a household should have a scratching post – positioned in different locations to prevent conflict. Some posts are impregnated with catnip, or you could try rubbing quality catnip on the scratch post to entice them – placing pieces of food on the post may also help. Playing with your cat little and often throughout the day and providing toys may help redirect their 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 the cat in this part of their territory and remedy it – see spraying section above. Follow the advice already given and cover the scratched areas with a protective material and place a scratching post next to them. However, to help your cat to feel secure in their surroundings and permanently stop them scratching the furniture, you will need to identify and deal with what is worrying them. Don't just provide them with another scratching surface without attending to their feelings of insecurity. You may need guidance from a suitably qualified behaviourist to help identify the cause of their anxiety.

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 they become more anxious, or learns that scratching can be used for attention seeking. Cats quickly learn that unwanted clawing gets a reaction, but clawing a scratching post doesn't. Make sure you praise your cat when they claw the scratching post and try not to react if they scratch the furniture.



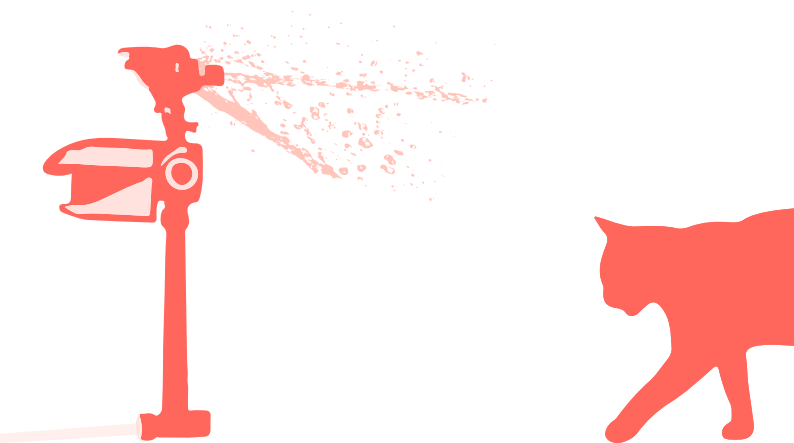
Humane deterrents for cats

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 – including the Scottish and Northern Irish equivalents – gives all cats legal protection. For more information see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Cats and the law*. For those who wish to avoid having cats visit their garden, the following advice may be useful.

- Shoo a cat away by either shouting or clapping your hands when you see them enter your garden
- Squirt water near the cat using a low-powered water pistol – not a super-soaker – being careful to avoid their eyes. Most cats hate water.
- Install an automatic garden spray, triggered by an infra-red detector which locates movement
- Erect high, close-boarded fences next to the hedges in the garden, making it difficult for cats to visit
- Avoid leaving food for birds and other wildlife in places that are easily accessible to cats and ensure dustbin lids are secure. In addition, do not start feeding a cat if you do not want them around as this will encourage the cat
- Cultivate shrubs closely to prevent cats from finding a place to dig. Spread chicken manure around beds and borders, taking care to use Soil Association approved pellets rather than fresh manure
- Consider covering parts of the garden that you do not want the cat to toilet in with stone chippings, pebbles or small rocks
- Lion dung-infused pellets, the planting of coleus canina and crushed egg shells have been used with varying levels of success to deter cats from toileting in flower beds

Hardy plants and the use of tall planters in strategically placed positions – eg entrances and protruding corners – can help to reduce the effects of cats marking their territory through spraying by encouraging them to use the plants.

Using 'home-made' or shop bought deterrents which could harm or injure a cat may be considered an offence under animal welfare legislation for causing unnecessary suffering, so bear this in mind when considering deterrents.



What is pheromone therapy?

Cats deposit pheromones (which are chemical signals of communication to themselves or other cats) from glands on their faces when rubbing objects such as the corners of walls or furniture. They leave behind different messages, one of these facial pheromones tells the cat that they are in an area they recognise and are safe. Cats regularly re-mark with these pheromones as they go around their home.

You can buy a synthetic version of this facial pheromone – Feliway® - to help your cat during times of stress. Feliway provides on-going support and comfort to cats reassuring them and marking the area as safe and secure. It is available from your vet or from the Cats Protection online pet shop – see www.catsprotectionshop.co.uk.

It is available as a plug-in diffuser, which lasts up to four weeks, continuously releasing the comforting pheromone into the local environment, and a spray, that can be used around the home or when travelling, lasting up to 24 hours. Alternatively, you can try using a clean cotton cloth or glove to gently rub on your cat's cheeks to collect the pheromone – and then rub this around on surfaces at cat height, such as onto new furniture, so that it smells familiar. Remember that the pheromone will need to be topped up regularly, until your cat either rubs its cheeks on the item or shows relaxed behaviour. Feliway can be a great support tool for helping stressed cats, however it is always recommended to rule out medical conditions first with your vet and it is important that the reason for your cat's anxiety is also identified and dealt with. If your cat has a behavioural problem, then it is recommended to get a referral from your vet to a qualified behaviourist such as a member of the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (www.apbc.org.uk).

Help is at hand

The advice given in this leaflet is aimed at encouraging positive behaviours and helping with some behavioural issues. However, it is not individually tailored to a specific cat and the development of behaviours in each cat is unique. The cause of a problem can sometimes be difficult to identify, particularly if it is complex or there are a number of contributing factors. If your cat has a behavioural problem, it is recommended to discuss the problem with your vet who can refer you to a suitably qualified behaviourist, such as a member of the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (www.apbc.org.uk) or a Certified Clinical Animal Behaviourist (CCAB) that can be found through the Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour (ASAB) at <http://asab.nottingham.ac.uk/>. Seek help sooner rather than later as it can be more difficult to rectify long-standing issues. Luckily many problems can be resolved, allowing you to enjoy positive companionship with your cat once more.

Happy relationships

Cats Protection has a clear vision of a world where every cat is treated with kindness and an understanding of its needs. What makes a cat unique is the very reason why they are so well loved. With a little understanding of your cat's background, behaviours and needs, you can prevent any problems that may arise and enjoy sharing your life a happy cat.

Learn more about your cat online!

Take a look at our free interactive tool to help you understand cats' origins and their behaviour within our homes. <http://learnonline.cats.org.uk/content/ufo>

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For more information about Cats Protection or to make a donation, please visit www.cats.org.uk or phone our Helpline on 03000 12 12 12.

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

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