



Cat behaviour: spraying

RSPCA COMPANION ANIMALS PET CARE FACTSHEET



Cats have become a much-loved pet, domesticated over thousands of years, though they retain much of the biology and behaviour of the wild cats they originated from. This means that they have very complex needs so looking after them well can sometimes be challenging. A good example is their natural territorial behavior, which can be expressed using a range of methods, including spraying urine, which obviously becomes a problem when your cat feels the need to do it indoors.

WHY DO CATS SPRAY?

Cats use urine as a scent signal or 'mark' for themselves and to communicate with other cats in their territory. 'Entire' (unneutered) male cats are particularly active in this behaviour, using it to communicate with rival males and potential mates, although both male and female cats actually have the ability to spray.



However, in some cases, the spraying behaviour may be due to anxiety or stress, therefore reasons for your cat exhibiting spraying behaviour can be very varied. It can include situations such as decorating and building work, threats from neighbouring cats, or a new cat in the household. However, each individual is different, as is their situation, and there could be many different causes for this behaviour.



The motivation for spraying behaviour is very different from the need to urinate. There is also a clear difference between a cat relieving itself in a normal way and in scent marking. To urinate, the cat squats and deposits a volume of urine on a horizontal surface- the carpet, duvet, or bath are commonly chosen sites. To spray, the cat stands up, usually making a treading motion with the hindlegs, tail upright and quivering. A small volume of urine is sprayed backwards onto a vertical surface such as a wall, leaving an obvious scent mark. Cats commonly choose a spot close to the door or window to spray.

If your cat is either urinating inappropriately or exhibiting spraying behaviour, this may be due to a health or behavioural issue.



WHAT CAN I DO IF MY CAT IS SPRAYING?

While neutering may help, it does not always prevent the development or onset of spraying behaviour, as it can also be linked with health and behaviour problems. The action that you take in order to treat your cat's spraying behaviour depends on its cause. There are a number of things that you can try in order to treat the problem:

- Speak to your vet. They will check that your cat is healthy and rule out any urinary problems, and can refer you to a recommended clinical animal behaviourist who may be able to help if it is found to be a behavioural issue.
- Make sure your cat can reach all the things that it needs (bed, water, litter or outdoors) without having to pass things or other animals that may scare him/her.





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Environment

- Make sure that your cat has constant access to safe hiding places where he/she can escape if feeling afraid.
- Try and be calm. A strong reaction to the spraying behavior may increase your cat's fear and anxiety and so increase the likelihood that it will happen again. As frustrating as the problem can be, it is important not to punish your cat when the behaviour has occurred.
- You will obviously want to remove the urine mark and how you do this is another important part of trying to prevent it happening again. Tempting though it is, using strong-scented products may encourage more marking behaviour. Mixing one part biological washing powder to nine parts water is effective in cleaning the area before rinsing with water, followed by a treatment of diluted surgical spirit, which should be allowed to dry naturally and access not be given to any pets until the area is dry.



Diet

If you are having difficulty, get your cat checked by a vet to rule out any form of illness or injury that could be causing a behaviour problem. Your vet may then refer you to a clinical animal behaviourist that should have a combination of appropriate qualifications, up to date knowledge, skills and experience and treat behaviour in a way which doesn't put the welfare of the cat at risk.



Behaviour

OTHER POSSIBLE LINKS:

- **Cat welfare needs [webpage](#)**
- **Find a [vet](#)**
- **Find a [behaviourist](#)**

Links to the web pages of other organisations are provided for additional information only and do not imply any endorsement by the RSPCA of those organisations or of any content on the website.



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