



Bringing Your New Cat Home

Adult cats are highly territorial by nature. Kittens are naturally less so, but will still benefit from the following steps to ease their transition into a new territory. Introducing a cat into a new home is extremely stressful for most cats. A cat's basic reaction to stress is to run and hide. You can help ease the cat's stress by providing a safe haven for him.

Step 1. Upon arriving home, set up a small room that will serve as the cat's initial territory. Any small, quiet room works well, such as a bathroom, small bedroom, or large walk-in closet. Keep the cat in the carrier while you are setting up the room, allowing him to adjust to the sounds and smells. Be sure to put everything the cat needs inside this room: litter box, food, water (food and water placed as far as possible from the litter box), toys, scratching post, bed, etc.

Step 2. Open up the carrier and let the cat decide whether he wants to explore or remain inside the carrier. Many times a cat will remain inside the carrier for hours.

Step 3. Give the cat time to adjust to his new territory. Come back to the room to visit often, but let the cat set the pace of the visits. Don't force your attention on the cat—when he wants affection, he will ask for it. When the cat is comfortable in this room (it may take a day, a week, or more) open the door and let him explore the rest of the house at his own pace. Cats usually begin investigating at night, making short explorations interspersed with rapid retreats to their safe haven. It is rare for a cat to explore a new territory without hesitation.

Patience is key. If the cat is allowed to adapt to a new environment at his own speed, everything generally works out in good time. Some cats take days, others will take weeks or months. The length of time needed to establish new territory will depend on the cat's temperament, past experiences, and whether there are other cats or dogs already present in the new home. If no other cats or dogs are present in the household, the adjustment period usually takes one to two weeks, but it may take several months.

See the handouts on Cat to Cat and Dog to Cat introductions for important steps to take in multi-pet households.

If you are concerned with what you might be seeing with your new cat, email info@cattownoakland.org for advice, or visit our website (www.cattownoakland.org) for additional resources.



Correcting Your Cat's Behavior

What to Do with Your Cat's Unwanted Behavior?

There might be times when you find yourself at wit's end with some of your cat's unwanted behaviors. One might want to punish a cat for less desirable behaviors; however, some of those behaviors might actually be just normal feline behaviors. With that in mind, it is important to recognize that these normal behaviors may need accommodations and management, changes in the environment, or simple behavior modification techniques to resolve most "problem" behaviors.

Some cats engage in problematic behaviors out of boredom such as lack of mental and physical stimulation. Similarly to a child where "negative" attention (such as being yelled at) is better than no attention at all, humans actually inadvertently reward unwanted behaviors. In this situation, the cat who is looking for some sort of response from the human might knock things off your dresser or scratch your furniture in hopes of gaining some attention from you.

Unfortunately, there is still plenty of outdated or just plain inaccurate information about how to punish cats for undesirable behaviors. Direct punishment should be avoided at all costs as direct physical punishment is detrimental to your relationship with your cat and can lead to fear and aggression. This includes spanking, pushing, scruffing and pinning down, swatting with a newspaper or other objects, nose tapping, or squirt bottles. Fearful as well as more confident cats might start hiding or become aggressive when direct punishment is used.

There are a variety of misconceptions about a cat's unwanted behaviors. Many people believe that their cat "knows" it is being bad or is behaving in an unwanted manner out of spite. Another misconception is that cats and people share the same idea of unwanted behavior. Scratching furniture and playing rough are natural for cats but undesirable for people. Using direct punishment in these instances most likely will not punish the motivation of the behavior, causing the cat to associate the presence of its owner with being yelled at or otherwise punished. The cat will not associate the scratching of the couch with the punishment. Since scratching is a normal feline behavior, she will quickly learn that when you are not home she can happily continue with this pleasure.

However this does not mean that we cannot set boundaries for our cats. Since we as humans have opposable thumbs and should have the ability to problem solve, we need to ensure that we provide cats with an environment that offers ample mental and physical enrichment to perform those natural feline behaviors in their appropriate areas. If they try something and have a good experience, they will do it again.

Correcting Your Cat's Behavior *(continued)*

Encourage Good Behavior

1. **Avoid and Manage:** provide your cat with appropriate opportunities and deny access to problems zone if needed—see our handouts for how to use a scratching post, litter box use, playing with your cat, and mental enrichment.
2. **Redirect, encourage, and reward good behaviors:** use treats, attention, and play to encourage your cat to play and interact with his items.
3. **Remote aversive:** use upside down carpet runners, sticky tape, lemon rinds, tinfoil, scat mat, motion activated air cans, or other remote distractors to keep your cat off the furniture or areas you do not want your cat to have access to.



Scratching & Declawing

Cats are loved for their companionship, playfulness, and gentle love they provide to a home. However, when people and cats live together, some natural feline behaviors can lead to destruction and injury to cat guardians and their property: a new couch being shredded or a child getting scratched by a playful kitten.

What Are Claws Used For?

First of all, it is important to understand a little bit about the physiology of the paw and claws. The paws are the basic framework of the anatomy of cats' legs. Claws are used for fundamental activities, including stretching and exercise, grooming, climbing and balance, defense, and stress relief.

Declawing is an extremely risky surgical procedure that endangers your cat's health, and is considered mutilation and is illegal in many other countries (including England, Turkey, Germany, Brazil, Norway, Sweden, Ireland, Switzerland, Italy, and Australia).

Often the surgery is misrepresented as some variation of nail trimming - in actuality, declawing is the cutting and amputating of the first joint (the toes) of a cat's paw.

In controlled studies, some cats develop litter box problems following declaw surgery, and are more likely to bite to express themselves. Declawed cats must not be let outdoors, as they cannot defend themselves or climb to escape danger.

Cat claws grow and need shedding and trimming, but there are alternatives to declawing that will help curb a cats unwanted scratching of furniture:

- **Get a scratching post or two.** Your cat will love you for it! *(See more below.)*
- **Consider "Soft Paws."** (colorful rubber sheaths that slip over your cat's nails to protect your furniture without harming your cat. They can be applied at most veterinary clinics or can be purchased in a take-home kit, usually lasting 2-3 months.)

Tips for Scratching Post Use:

- Vertical posts must be sturdy and tall enough for the cat to stretch his body. Horizontal marking posts are preferred by some cats. Try both types to find out what your cat prefers.
- The posts should be located in prominent areas in your home. Cats often scratch when they wake up from a nap so put one near the cat's sleeping area.
- You can buy ready-made scratching posts at the pet store, or you can make your own. A simple log is preferred by some cats. For others, a piece of corrugated cardboard mounted on a piece of wood works just fine. Although most pre-made posts are covered with carpet, this may not be the best material to use. **Cats can get their claws stuck in the fabric loops and stop using the post as a result.** Try attaching the carpet upside down or using another material like upholstery fabric that is more "shreddable".

Scratching & Declawing *(continued)*

- Attract your cat to the post using catnip. Sprinkle the catnip on the base and into the fabric, or hang bags of catnip from the top. Spend time near the post encouraging your cat to interact with it. Play with the cat near the post and incorporate it into your play.
- The most important step is to reward the cat every time he uses the post. Have yummy food treats nearby and give one to the cat whenever you see him scratching the post.

Once your cat is using the scratching post you have provided, you can teach him that other things are off limits. If you catch your cat scratching the sofa or chair, make those areas undesirable by covering them with aluminum foil or double sided sticky tape or lightly spray the area with a lemon scent. **Do not spray or scold your cat as this can make him fearful of you and your cat may learn to scratch the sofa or couch in your absence.** It's important to entice your cat to the scratching post and praise him for using it.

Types of Posts

Horizontal or vertical. The first thing to consider when buying your cat a scratching post or furniture is whether or not he prefers vertical or horizontal surfaces. Some cats like to rear up and pull down, while others like to stretch way out along the floor and pull. Most large cat trees provide both surfaces, while the basic post is more for vertical than horizontal. Cardboard types tend to lie directly on the floor. Some types of vertical scratching posts can be hung from a doorknob or off the back of a door. The best thing you can do is observe your cat. If he tends to rear up to claw, then a vertical post is your best bet. If your cat favors your carpet or rugs, then a floor-based horizontal scratching post is better.

Sisal rope. Sisal rope scratching posts and cat furniture provide long-lasting scratching surfaces for cats. Sisal is very tough and resists shredding very well. Sisal scratching posts are excellent choices for cats that prefer to claw and scratch rough surfaces. The main downside to sisal is that it is not very easy to incorporate catnip into in order to make it more attractive to your cat.

Carpet. Carpeted scratching posts and cat furniture make up the bulk of most manufactured products. It is easily made, easy to work with, and can be attached to many different surfaces and shapes. Carpet is not nearly as durable as sisal, so over time it shreds and loses bits of the nap, making it messy. Carpet also retains dirt and debris, so it will need occasional vacuuming.

Cardboard. Cardboard scratching surfaces are fairly new and by far the cheapest alternative. Most cardboard scratching surfaces are refillable. Cardboard, which has a lot of holes, can easily accommodate catnip to make it more attractive; however, it shreds easily, leading to bits of cardboard around the house. Some cats also like to chew on cardboard, which is not good due to the chemicals present within it.

Wood. Wood is another type of scratching surface. These types are not very common but are probably the closest thing to what a cat in the wild would use to stretch, mark, and shed on. A wood post will be very durable, more so than sisal. It does not lend itself to hosting catnip, but it also will not retain dirt or leave bits of itself lying around.



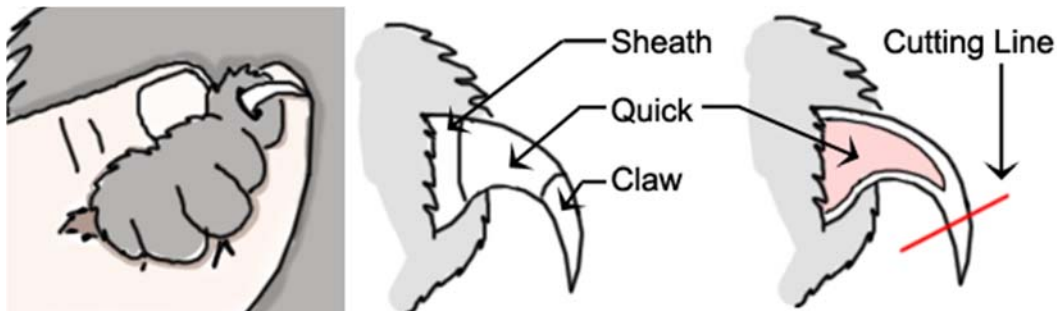
Claw Clipping

Indoor cats even with access to a scratching post need to have their claws clipped occasionally, some might need it as frequent as every few months. Cats will scratch for a variety of reasons, and it is an important natural behavior of a cat's. Scratching marks the territory, helps the cat stretch, and in some cases relieves anxiety and stress. By scratching the cat removes the "dead" layers of the nails, thus making the nail thinner and sharper. Nails that have not been trimmed for a long time may grow in a circular shape causing the sharp tip to grow into the cat's paw pad. In older cats the nails often become thick and hard, which can lead to pain or even lameness. Providing an appropriate scratching surface and checking the nails regularly is essential to meeting the basic health and behavioral needs of your cat.

By trimming your cat's nails regularly you can reduce the amount of damage the claws do. Follow the steps below to help you with this process.

How to Do It

- Check the cat's paws for dirt; although they usually keep their own feet clean, you will want to be able to see the claw clearly. You can extend the cat's nail by picking up the cat's foot and gently applying a little pressure on the top and bottom of the toe just behind the nail.
- Make sure there is enough light. Be sure you can see the whole nail; you may need to pull back fur if your cat has long hair.
- Keep the clippers perpendicular to the nail. Look for the "quick" in the cat's nail. The quick is a vein. You can see it as the pinkish area inside the nail. Notice how far into the nail the quick extends. The clipper is best placed about 1/8 inch before the quick.



Claw Clipping *(continued)*

If You Trim the Nail Too Close

Be aware not to trim too close to the quick. If you do your cat may pull away from you, meow, hiss, or even try to bite you. You may observe a small bit of blood on the end of the nail. Wipe the blood away with a tissue or paper towel. Dab some flour or styptic powder on the tip to stop the bleeding. You can find these products at the drug store or at a pet shop. In the future, do not cut the nails so close to the quick.

Tips

- Handle your cat's paws regularly: while your cat is relaxed gently touch and massage the paws on a regular basis. At first you will touch and massage each paw briefly, then as time goes on your massages can lengthen and the pressure you apply can also increase. Your cat will then be prepared at claw clipping time.
- Ask someone to help you; it is much easier than trying to hold a struggling cat and handle the nail clippers simultaneously. Have your helper pet around the head of the cat or offer him wet food or baby food while you trim a few nails at a time. Take a break then trim a few more.
- Choose a time when your cat is calm—naptime may be the best. It is possible that you may only be able to do one paw at a time, especially at first.



Litterbox Problems

If your cat is urinating or defecating outside the litter box, we certainly understand your frustration. Luckily, this is a treatable condition in most cases. A medical exam, as well as a few simple changes can help to re-establish proper litter box use.

The first step includes taking your cat to your veterinarian. Whenever a cat suddenly eliminates outside of the litter box, it's strongly advised to get a physical exam including urine analysis and in some cases blood work in order to rule out any illness or injury that may be causing the behavior. Once a medical reason for the lapse in box use has been ruled out, you want to consider behavioral reasons.

There are two main behavioral reasons for failure to eliminate in an established litter box. One is **marking**, which is a form of communication. The second one is **inappropriate elimination**, which is a toileting behavior. Both behaviors may occur for a variety of reasons and we first need to figure out which category your cat belongs to. In some cases this is not as easy as it seems and you will need a professional to help you.

Answer the following 4 questions:

1. *Is your cat depositing urine on vertical or horizontal surfaces?*
2. *Are you finding large or small amounts of urine?*
3. *Is your cat still using the litter box or has litter box use decreased?*
4. *Does your cat stand or squat when she is urinating outside the litter box?*

Recommendations if You Think Your Cat Is Marking

If your cat backs into the wall with her tail up and squirts small amounts of urine onto vertical surfaces such as the wall, front door, or windows, your cat most likely is displaying marking behavior, most often triggered by territoriality or stress. While the triggers may seem benign to us, they can likely be a source of turmoil for your cat. Popular triggers include: a new home, new furniture, or the smell or view of a strange cat strolling through the yard or passing by your front door.

This is a normal feline behavior; some cats use urine as a form of communication. In order to get the marking behavior under control, you need to do a number of things all at once.

1. Because the odor of urine draws cats back to previously marked areas, you will have to clean all soiled areas with an enzymatic cleanser. You should take a black light to help you locate all the spots in your house; urine will glow yellow-green in the dark. As the amounts are often small you might be missing areas where your cat sprays. Additionally, it is key to implement excellent litter box hygiene, which has been proven to significantly decrease the incidence of spraying.

Litterbox Problems *(continued)*

- Make previously marked areas unavailable (close doors to certain rooms).
- Place one litter box per cat in the household, plus one extra. Litter boxes should be in different rooms to count as separate boxes because two boxes right next to each other count as one.
- If you have a multi-story house, have litter boxes on each level.
- Keep litter boxes away from food and water bowls, as well as the washer and dryer.
- Always keep the litter box clean. Scoop the box at least once daily and completely empty and clean it with mild dishwashing liquid weekly.

2. Then try to identify any new stressors in your cat's life. Once you have been able to do so, work to change or remove them. This can be done simply by blocking your cat's view of strange cats with covers on the front window. However, keep in mind that the outside cats might be marking the outside of your door. In this case, you need to deter stray cats from coming near your front door or window, and you will have to clean those areas as well. Deterring cats from coming to your yard or front door can be done with motion activated deterrents. It can also help to initially confine your cat to a separate part of the house where she is more comfortable.

3. Enrich your cat's environment by providing more resting and hiding places, multiple feeding locations, scratching boxes and posts, and interactive toys. Meal times can be made more interesting by hiding small quantities of food around the house or using food dispensing toys to keep an indoor cat busy and less worried about things going on outside the home.

4. A feline facial pheromone, Feliway®, is another option that may help decrease the urine marking.

Recommendations if You Think Your Cat Displays Inappropriate Elimination

Unlike your mother or your roommate, your cat is not worried about your tidiness or lack thereof, even though it may seem that way from the human perspective. However, it is important to keep your cat's litter box tidy and appealing. Cats are picky and if the litter box is not just as your cat likes it, or where your cat likes it to be, then any clothes you may have strewn either on the ground or inside of a laundry basket may become the perfect litter box alternative.

Once medical reasons have been ruled out, review the following guidelines to help identify the issue:

- **Are there enough boxes?** The magic number is one box per cat in the household, plus one extra—these boxes should be in different rooms to count as separate boxes. Two litter boxes are important in one-cat households because many cats prefer to urinate in one location and defecate in another.
- **Offer different types of litter to find your cat's preferred litter:** Clumping, non-clumping, sand, clay, etc. If your cat is using soft surfaces such as laundry, chances are your litter is too coarse or too shallow. Use a fine granulated type of litter so the surface is soft and deep, similar to laundry.
- **Type of box:** Many cats dislike covered boxes, especially in multi-cat households, as the cover on the box limits the cat's ability to protect herself from being ambushed by other cats. Also, many commercially available litter boxes are simply too small for an average-sized cat,

Litterbox Problems *(continued)*

let alone a large cat. The box should be at least 1 ½ times the length and width of your cat. If your cat is too large for “jumbo” boxes available at pet stores (and many, if not most, are), many people are successful using a large plastic storage bin with a “door” cut into it, or under-the-bed storage bins, which have lower sides and may not need to be cut.

- **Use of litter box liners, harsh detergents, and scented litters:** Cats tend to avoid plastic liners, which catch their claws when they scratch and make unpleasant (to a cat) crinkling sounds. The use of harsh or strong smelling cleaners to clean the box may repel your cat, whose nose is much more sensitive than yours.
- **Depth of litter:** Most cats prefer to have several inches of litter to dig around in, but some prefer shallower litter. Experiment to find your cat’s preference.
- **Trauma associated with the litter box:** Has your cat ever experienced painful urination or defecation, or other traumatic event associated with the litter box? Do you have dogs or children in your home that might harass the cat when she is trying to use the box?
- **Always keep the litter box clean**—the box might be dirty and the laundry basket may be the only “clean alternative,” so be sure to scoop daily.
- Use mild dishwashing liquid to wash the box weekly.
- **Location:** Place the litter box in the same room your cat is eliminating outside the box.
- Keep litter boxes away from food and water bowls, as well as the washer and dryer.
- If you have a multi-story house, have litter boxes on each level.
- **The lingering scent of previous accidents:** Once your cat has had an accident, it’s important to clean the soiled area thoroughly with an enzymatic cleaner meant for urine, such as Nature’s Miracle or Anti-Icky Poo (available at the SF SPCA, at most pet stores, or online). Strong citrus scents tend to repel cats, so scented detergent may be helpful as a deterrent.
- **You might also try Cat Attract**, a litter additive available in many pet supply stores. Every cat is different, of course, but we have seen great success with using Cat Attract.

Tips

- Always begin by consulting your veterinarian to rule out medical causes.
- Check all the above guidelines as every cat and situation is different.
- **VERY IMPORTANT: Do not punish your cat for marking as this will not solve the problem; this can make your cat even more anxious.**



Indoor vs. Outdoor

Indoor cats and outdoor cats encounter different challenges and risks. An indoor cat might suffer from boredom and medical issues such as obesity leading to stress, behavior problems, and early death; the outdoor cat is at higher risk for diseases, injuries, and getting lost. Whatever you and your cat's choice is, it is important to maintain good welfare for both options.

Making the Outdoors Safe

- Talk to your veterinarian and maintain and update all vaccines needed for an outdoor cat, regular flea and heartworm prevention, and regular de-worming.
- Make sure your cat is neutered or spayed and micro-chipped.
- Make sure the immediate outdoors are safe for roaming cats. If your backyard has a fence around it, consider installing the “Cat Fence.” This netting system prevents your cat from leaving the yard, so you know where he is at all times. It can also be used to keep other cats out of your yard.
- Build an enclosure outside. This allows your cat to have an outdoor experience while remaining safe. Check cat magazines for ideas and plans.
- If you have a younger cat, train him to accept a leash and harness. This way, you can take the cat on monitored outdoor excursions. See the leash training handout for more details.
- Never tie your cat outside or inside.

Making the Indoors Attractive

- Offer plenty of play and environmental enrichment.
- Talk to your veterinarian about an appropriate diet and caloric intake.
- Put screens on your windows and get a kitty window seat.
- Play with your cat more. Get him running around, chasing a string or other toys several times a day. See handout on how to play with your cat. A little catnip makes it even more fun!
- Add vertical space to the cat's territory. Cat trees, cat condos, shelves, and other climbing apparatuses give your cat more places to climb, play, and call his own.
- Provide scratching posts. Try posts made of different materials—corrugated cardboard, wood, carpet, or sisal rope. You can get freestanding scratching posts, floor level, or door hanging varieties. See handout on using scratching posts.
- Play videos. Many cats enjoy watching videos of cats, birds, fish, insects, and nature scenes. Check your local pet supply and video stores.
- Grow kitty grass. Available at many pet supply stores, it is safe and tasty for your cat to nibble.

Indoor vs. Outdoor *(continued)*

- Make your cat “work for food” and use food dispensing and puzzle toys.
- If your cat is an “only child”, consider adopting another to keep him company.
- Have at least one more litter box than cats and place them in areas your cat has easy access.
- Not every cat is an indoor only cat.

Remember: even indoor cats should be regularly vaccinated, receive flea prevention, and be micro-chipped. In an earthquake, fire, burglary, or other mishap, a cat can easily become lost outside, and identification is his best bet for getting home.