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Feline Behavior

Learning normal feline behaviors and the techniques to manage these behaviors is very important knowledge for all cat owners. It is also important to know which behaviors are considered abnormal so that these behaviors can be corrected before they lead to problems.

Normal behaviors for domesticated cats include: socializing (interacting with people and other pets); predatory behaviors including chasing, stalking, biting, scratching, urinating or defecating in a designated area (litter box); grooming daily; and sleeping several hours per day (often in high areas).

Abnormal behaviors for domesticated cats include: hiding from people and other pets, eliminating outside of their litter box, overgrooming causing hair loss or wounds on the skin, aggressive behavior such as attacking and biting people or other pets, and howling at night or not sleeping.

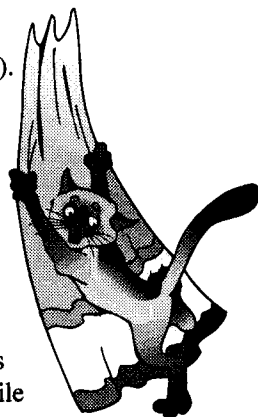
Feline Socialization & Play Time

Training your cat can be simple and fun if started early and properly when your relationship begins. The first step to a well-behaved cat is good socialization which can be accomplished by gradually exposing them to stimuli that they will experience in their lifetime. For example: other cats, dogs, people, veterinary office, cat carrier, car rides, various food types, toys, and grooming facilities. To ensure a good socialization experience make sure the situation starts out controlled. Introduce your cat to a dog that is known to be nice to cats. Feed your cats a meal or treats in the carrier several times before they have to take a trip in it. Take your cat to the veterinary hospital for several happy visits (no medical procedures are done at these visits). Try taking your cat for several car rides that do not end at the vet or grooming facility.

The second important step to a well-behaved cat is allowing proper outlets for normal behaviors such as scratching, chasing, jumping, biting, and stalking. To ensure your cat gets plenty of opportunity to scratch without harming your furniture you should follow these simple rules:

- Keep several scratching posts throughout the home
- Try several different materials to find what your cat likes to scratch on best (carpet, cardboard, woven material, etc).
- Ensure your cat has at least one scratching post that is tall enough for your cat to stretch as well as scratch.
- Make sure to have scratching posts close to resting areas.

The best outlet for your cat's predatory behavior (chasing, jumping, biting and scratching) is to schedule interactive playtime with your cat daily. Adult cats require at least 2 playtimes per day while kittens need at least 4. These playtimes ensure that your cat can act on a predatory behavior in a safe and fun manner, rather than attacking



you when you walk by. There are several ways to play with your cat, such as: interactive cat toys, self-play cat toys, and throwing their food or treats for them to chase before they eat them. Always make sure to use a toy when playing with your cat; never allow your cat to bite or scratch you directly, as this can result in aggression later in life. If you have a cat that tends to get aggressive when playing, it is best to give that cat a large stuffed toy to grab onto and bite or scratch at play. This will help to relieve aggression.

Most cats, even when indoors, love the opportunity to climb and jump. As this is a normal instinct for them, the best way to allow them to act on this instinct is to provide them with cat furniture. Cat furniture is usually several feet tall and is often equipped with scratching posts and resting areas. These pieces of furniture offer a safe and fun haven for all indoor cats.



Feline Training

The following are a few simple things that all cat owners need to teach their cat to ensure a peaceful home: where to urinate or defecate, where to sleep, what to scratch, what to play with, and what to eat. Many people fail to take these simple steps to training their cat and will often end up with a cat that is considered "bad" when they are really just untrained.

The most important thing that cats need to be trained with is the litter box. When starting a cat out with litter box training in your home it is vital that you follow these rules:

- 1.) Have an appropriate sized box for your cat.
- 2.) Always use the same litter.
- 3.) Have at least one box per cat and at least one box per level in the home.
- 4.) Scoop the box daily and dump completely at least once per month.
- 5.) Do not put the litter box in high traffic areas, or where there are loud noises such as the laundry room (think shoes in the dryer!).

Even the most well-trained cat can stop using the litter box due to the following factors: illness, change in litter type or brand, and stress in the environment (new cat, moving litter box, house construction). In order to narrow down the reason for your cat's behavior change, it is vital to get your cat to your veterinary office right away when you discover your cat is no longer using the litter box.

The other behaviors such as scratching, playing, sleeping, and eating do not need to be trained, however these behaviors need to be properly directed. It is important to have several different scratching posts, toys, sleeping areas (including higher areas), and food types (as kittens) to ensure your pet has the right environment to promote good behavior. All of these factors keep your pet happy and healthy and keep your home both cat and people friendly, too.

Additional resources:

Indoor Pet Initiative – for advice on enrichment of the life of the indoor cat. <http://indoorpet.osu.edu>

The Cat Wheel Company – distributor of a cat exercise wheel: www.catwheelcompany.com

Heartworm Testing Reminder

Although we sent out a detailed letter early this spring, we want to remind everyone that we are now recommending yearly heartworm testing for all of our patients regardless of whether or not they are on year-round heartworm prevention. We no longer feel it is safe for our patients to skip a year in between testing. By skipping a year we can miss diagnosing an infected patient earlier in the progression of this dangerous disease and thereby potentially worsening the chances of a full recovery. If you have more questions feel free to contact us or visit our Facebook page for more details.

Zoonosis?

What is it and what does it have to do with me?

Zoonosis (zoo-o-no-sis): a disease that is passed from animals to humans.

When most people think of zoonotic disease they think of severe diseases like rabies, anthrax, and monkeypox, but these



are very infrequently seen. More often zoonotic infections come from our pets in the form of hookworm and roundworm infections, which are the most common intestinal parasites. Children are the most susceptible to zoonotic diseases because they are more often touching and grabbing things and putting their dirty hands in their mouth. These parasites can cause multiple health problems that can be severe or even fatal in rare cases. The good news is zoonosis is entirely preventable by having your veterinarian perform routine fecal examinations on your pet's stool and by using year-round parasite control products for your pets. It is also important to reinforce good hygiene for ourselves and our children, such as hand washing. You can visit www.cdc.gov or www.capc.com for more in-depth information.

As always, if there are any questions about the topics in this newsletter or any other topics, please call us or visit our website. All suggestions about our services, or new services that you would like, are encouraged.