

# Cat Behaviour 101

## The Litter Box

The following will help maximize good litter box habits and make the litter box experience a good one for both you and your cat.

### General Tips

- One litter box per cat is recommended.
- Scoop the litter box every day. After all, you wouldn't want to use a dirty toilet either!
- Wash litter pans regularly with mild soap; rinse and dry.
- Do not switch brands or types of litter suddenly. Gradually mix the old with the new.
- Do not underfill or overfill litter boxes. If there is not enough litter in the box to adequately cover waste, cats may develop an aversion to the box. A good depth of litter also prevents urine and feces from sticking to the bottom of the box.
- Open litter boxes are best. Hooded or enclosed boxes may make cats feel trapped. They also trap in odours.

### Placement and Location

- Always locate the litter box away from the cat's food and water dishes.
- If you have a new cat settling in, place a litter box on every level of your home. It must be convenient and accessible.
- Always locate a litter boxes in a quiet secluded place. Do not place litter boxes in high traffic areas or near noisy appliances such as washing machines and dryers.
- Do not change the location of a litter box abruptly. Do it in stages.
- If your cat is nervous or older, you may need to place the litter pan closer to the area in your house where the cat likes to sleep or eat.

### Multi-Cat Families

- Multi-cat families have a hierarchical nature with "lower ranking" and "higher ranking" cats. In order to accommodate the different personalities, you should have multiple litter box locations so your lower ranking cats do not have to enter the territory of a more dominant cat.
- Remember: different cats prefer different types of litter. This means that in multi-cat families, you may have to provide a couple options.

### Troubleshooting Litter Box Problems and Spraying Behaviour

- If your cat is having problems using the litter box, praise your cat and/or give the cat a treat when it uses the litter box appropriately.
- Soft, fluffy bedding such as quilts and duvets may be an attractive alternative to the litter box in the early weeks of settling in for a new cat. Scattered dirty laundry or laundry piles may also invite your cat to urinate/eliminate inappropriately. Remove and store these items or prevent access. Remember, new cats may be nervous or unfamiliar with their surroundings and kittens may simply forget the location or not have the bladder and/or bowel control to make it to the box.



- Soil at the base of potted plants can also look very inviting to cats. Cover the base with tinfoil or get rid of the plants if this becomes a problem.
- Strangers, babies, guests, new roommates, sudden schedule changes or other changes in the household may cause stress and therefore, inappropriate urination/elimination.
- New animals such as puppies/dogs, other cats, birds or any other species may cause territorial marking. Even the sight of another cat through a window may cause spraying.
- Previously sprayed/marked furniture can also attract new cats to spray (and leave their mark). The smell often remains for years. Consult a pet supply centre for effective cleaning products.
- Illnesses and health conditions such as urinary tract infections may also lead to inappropriate bathroom habits. Please consult your veterinarian immediately.
- If your vet determines that the inappropriate urination or elimination is behavioural, try using Dr. Elsey's Cat Attract Litter or a different brand other than what you are currently using.

## Scratching

Cats scratch to stretch, exercise specific shoulder and back muscles, express happiness and play, groom and mark territory. Scratching makes cats feel good and keeps their nails trimmed and free of old sheaths (layers). For cats, scratching is as natural as breathing air.

### How to Promote Good Scratching Behaviour

- Cat claws grow just as your fingernails do and need regular trimming. Regular trimming of claws every 4 to 6 weeks keeps cats comfortable. Note: Only the clear hooked portion of each claw is trimmed.
- Provide at least one scratching post at least one metre in height. The taller, the better. Posts should be well constructed and placed near a sunny window or near places where your family gathers.
- A sprinkle of catnip at the base of the scratching post or a game wiggling a wand toy up the post will encourage use.
- Some cats prefer horizontal surfaces for scratching, such as a jute door mat or corrugated cardboard scratcher from a pet supply store.
- Use positive reinforcement. Reward your cat for good scratching behaviour with treats, affection and attention.

### Troubleshooting Inappropriate Scratching Behaviour

If your cat is scratching inappropriate objects, there are a number of effective ways to prevent the behaviour.

- Place a scratching post / cat tree nearby. Young or old, most cats will learn how to use and love their scratching posts. In fact, large, multi-level posts will become your cat's playground, bedroom, observation deck, tanning salon, couch and favourite hiding spot.
- Use double-sided tape to prevent scratching of furniture or limit access.
- Discipline with a spray water bottle, a loud noise or a firm 'NO'.
- Another option for problem scratchers is a product called 'Soft Paws'. Soft paws are acrylic claw covers that are applied with a non-toxic adhesive to the cats nails. Each application of 'soft paw' claw covers lasts about 2-3 months. Think of these like glue-on nails for cats.

## How to Safely Trim Your Cat's Claws

- Small commercially produced cat claw clippers (from your local pet store) or human fingernail clippers work well for trimming feline claws.
- To familiarize your kitten or cat with having its claws trimmed, begin by gently touching or stroking its paws without clipping.
- Always try to trim a cat's claws when they are very relaxed or sleepy.
- To trim, hold the paw and gently press the toe pad to extend the claw. Trim the clear pointed hook end of the claw. Be careful not to cut into the pink area or 'the quick' found in the upper half of the claw as this will cause pain and bleeding.
- If the cat becomes impatient or restless, take a break. Sometimes you can only trim one or two claws per day, but the job will get done.
- Reward your cat with a treat to encourage his cooperation.
- If your cat does not cooperate, seek assistance from your veterinarian or an experienced cat groomer.
- Claws can be trimmed approximately every 4 to 6 weeks.

## Declawing is Harmful and Inhumane

As an animal rescue society and proponent of animal welfare, MEOW believes that declaw and tendonectomy surgeries are without benefit to cats and are inhumane. All species are equal in their right to be treated with respect and compassion. It is also important for cat owners to understand the facts and health risks of declawing.

- A cat's claw is NOT like a human fingernail. A claw is part of the last bone of the cat's foot. To remove the claw, the bone, nerve, joint capsule, collateral ligaments and the extensor and flexor tendons are removed. Put simply, a declaw is an amputation. Declaw surgery is 10 amputations.
- A good comparison to a declaw would be cutting off a human finger at the last joint.
- Declaw and tendonectomy surgeries can have many serious complications such as damage to the radial nerve, haemorrhage, infection, excruciating phantom pain for life, chronic back, shoulder and joint pain (as previously used muscles weaken) and possible behavioural changes such as biting, social anxiety and litter box problems.
- Elective declaw surgeries are illegal in numerous regions of the world, including the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Denmark, Finland, Estonia, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, Brazil, Israel, France, Northern Ireland, Portugal and Belgium.

## Other Unwanted Behaviours

Many cat owners may feel dismayed by a cat's behaviour whether natural or just unwanted within the context of the home. These behaviours may range from jumping on counters to scratching furniture to inappropriate marking or aggression. To correct such behaviours, immediacy is the key. Discipline must be done at the moment of the unwanted behaviour or not at all. Spray water bottles, loud noises, firm 'NOS' or removing your cat from the situation are effective deterrents.

Pet owners should also be proactive in preventing problems. Cat proof your home and get to know your cat's natural or normal patterns and behaviours within your home so you can better predict and avoid possible unwanted behaviours.

Remember: NEVER physically punish your cat. Behaviour modification or discipline is a form of love. Do it kindly and consistently. If you need advice, do not hesitate to speak with your veterinarian or request a referral to a certified animal behaviourist. Professionals can often offer a diagnosis and treatment plan for your pet.