

Feline Immune Deficiency Viruses

What are feline immune deficiency viruses?

Feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and feline leukemia (FeLV) belong to a family of viruses known as retroviruses. The most infamous retrovirus is HIV, which causes AIDS in people. The major characteristic of retroviruses is that they decrease the ability of the immune system to fight infections.

Humans and dogs cannot catch FIV or FeLV or develop AIDS through exposure to FIV-positive or FeLV-positive cats. Only cats are susceptible to these diseases.

How do cats get FIV or FeLV?

Most cats become infected with FIV when they are bitten while fighting with an infected cat. The virus, present in the saliva of infected cats, passes beneath the skin of the victim when he is bitten. FIV is not spread by casual contact between cats- it is unusual for cats in the same household to spread the disease to each other unless they fight.

FeLV is spread through contact with saliva, urine or blood. Also, an infected mother cat can pass the virus to her kittens before they are born or through her milk while nursing.

How do I know if my cat has FIV?

In most cases, there is no way to know whether your cat has FIV without a blood test. All kittens and cats should be tested to determine if they are infected, even if they show no physical signs of the disease.

FIV infection progresses slowly, with a long interval between initial exposure and the onset of signs of the disease. Cats diagnosed with FIV infection may remain free of symptoms for years. Because their immune systems are compromised, FIV-positive cats often develop illnesses that are unrelated to the virus itself. It is the onset of these illnesses that may be the first indication a cat is immunosuppressed, thus raising suspicions of an underlying retroviral infection.

Common health problems reported in cats in the chronic state of FIV infection include:

- o Oral cavity infections
- o Upper-respiratory infections
- o Weight loss
- o Skin infections
- o Ear infections
- o Fever of unknown origin
- o Enlarged lymph nodes
- o Low red or white blood cell counts
- o Kidney disease
- o Eye disease
- o Reproductive failure, such as spontaneous abortions or stillbirths
- o Neurologic disease, such as personality changes, tremors or seizures



How do I know if my cat has FeLV?

Cats can carry FeLV disease without showing any physical signs. The only way to know for certain whether your cat has FeLV is to have your veterinarian test his blood for the presence of FeLV virus. All cats and kittens should be tested, even if they show no physical signs of disease.

Like cats with FIV, cats with FeLV often develop illnesses that are unrelated to the virus itself because their immune systems are compromised. Health problems associated with FeLV include:

- o Anemia, which causes a lack of pink or red color in the gums
- o Weight loss
- o Recurring or chronic illness
- o Fading kitten syndrome, during which a kitten becomes progressively weaker
- o A syndrome like distemper, with lethargy, fever and diarrhea
- o Persistent or recurring fevers or infections
- o Rapid breathing or difficult with breathing
- o Jaundice, which causes a yellow color in the mouth and/or the whites of the eyes
- o Eye infections and disease
- o Certain types of cancer



Is there any treatment for FIV or FeLV?

To date, there is no cure for FIV or FeLV infection. FIV-positive cats are considered to be infected for life. Some cats infected with FeLV may revert to a FeLV negative status, but others remain infected for life. Your veterinarian can provide supportive care for your cat and can treat some of the secondary illnesses that develop because of these diseases.

Diagnostic tests, such as blood profiles, fecal exams, urinalyses, and radiographs (x-rays), are frequently required before your veterinarian can begin treatment. Care may include providing fluids, B-vitamins, appetite stimulants and antidiarrheal medications. Though there are no drugs or therapeutic agents licensed for treatment of feline retroviral infections at this time, cats may benefit from certain prescription medications. Other forms of therapy, such as homeopathy, botanical medicine, and nutritional supplementation, are also gaining popularity. However, there is no scientific evidence to prove that these less conventional forms of therapy are effective.

The prognosis for FIV positive or FeLV positive cats depends on 1) the stage of infection; 2) the nature and severity of any coexisting infection; 3) how promptly and aggressively the infection is treated. Cats can live long and relatively healthy lives despite retroviral infection. This is because some related disorders, including secondary infections, respond well if they are diagnosed early and treated aggressively.

How can these diseases be prevented?

First, it is important to vaccinate your cat against FeLV if it encounters other cats. Your veterinarian can discuss your cat's potential exposure to and risk of developing FeLV infection. Currently, there are no vaccines to protect cats against FIV infection.

Second, make sure your cat is never exposed to an FIV positive or FeLV positive cat. This means keeping your cat indoors and separated from all cats of unknown FeLV and FIV status. Unsupervised outdoor activity puts cats at risk. There is no way to ensure that cats allowed to roam freely outdoors will not be exposed to other cats that have an immune deficiency disease. Most cats currently infected with FeLV or FIV were first exposed to the disease through this kind of contact.

Third, have all your cats tested for FIV and FeLV on a regular basis. Testing is recommended for:

- o Any newly acquired kitten or adult cat BEFORE it joins a multiple cat household and prior to the first FeLV vaccine.

- o Any cat used for breeding

- o Any cat with known FIV or FeLV exposure (if the first test is negative, retest every three to six months for one year)

- o Any sick cat with symptoms that suggest FeLV or FIV infection.

Spaying & Neutering

Why is it important to spay or neuter my pet?

Your pet is a companion, a friend, and a member of your family. But not all pets are as cherished as yours are. In animal shelters throughout North America, four to six million dogs and cats are euthanized each year. Although these figures seem staggering, it's easy to understand when you consider this: If one pair of cats produces eight kittens per year, and each of those kittens then produces an average of eight kittens per year, there are almost 300,000 cats in the "family tree" in year six. In year seven, the descendants of the original mother and father numbered almost 2.4 million.

For every kitten or puppy that finds a happy home, four others are unwanted, unloved and possibly neglected or abused. Don't be part of the problem...be part of the solution! Spaying and neutering your pet not only help reduce the number of unwanted pets, it also provides long-term health benefits to your dog or cat.



What is spaying?

Spaying of female dogs and cats, called ovariohysterectomy, is the surgical removal of the ovaries, fallopian tubes, and uterus. Spaying your pet eliminates all heat cycles and the accompanying unwanted bleeding, nervousness and desire to mate.

Female dogs and cats are often mature enough to reproduce once they reach the age of six to nine months. Female dogs go through a reproductive, or “heat”, cycle every six months, usually once in the spring and again in the fall. The cycle begins with proestrus, or “bleeding”, prior to the true heat cycle, when the female is receptive to the reproductive advances of males. The entire cycle may be as short as a few days or as long as three to four weeks. Often, female dogs will experience some personality changes during heat cycles, such as becoming short-tempered or anxious.

Female cats enter their reproductive cycles continuously every three to four weeks during certain times of the year, primarily in the spring and fall. They rarely show any signs of bleeding during their reproductive cycles. Many female cats become nervous during heat cycles and exhibit unusual behaviors, such as rolling on the floor, hiding furtively, or begging for constant attention. They often become quite vocal, too, meowing through their cycles.

Studies show that by spaying your female dog or cat before her first heat cycle, you greatly reduce her chances of developing mammary (breast) cancer later in life. Having your female dog or cat spayed will also protect her from uterine infections and difficult or dangerous pregnancies. Spaying your pet may reduce her metabolism. Consult your veterinarian to determine if your pet’s food intake should be adjusted accordingly.



What is neutering?

Neutering of male dogs and cats, called orchiectomy, is the process of surgically removing the testicals. If neutering is done at an early age, it eliminates reproductive behavior.

After they reach sexual maturity at six to nine months of age, male dogs and cats are able to breed any time they are exposed to a receptive female. Unneutered male dogs and cats are prone to wander in search of a female in heat. This means trouble! Pets that wander are more frequently exposed to disease, and they get injured in fights and traffic accidents much more often.

Male cats are known to “mark” their territories by spraying odorous urine on furniture, walls, shrubs, etc. Male dogs are sometimes equally anxious to mark their territories. This tendency is greatly reduced when the pet is neutered. Neutering may also reduce aggressive behavior in dogs.

Male dogs and cats’ benefit from the neutering process in other ways as well. They are less likely to develop diseases of the prostate gland and are no longer at risk for testicular cancer and infections.

After neutering, your male dog or cat will continue to have his own unique personality. He will be less likely to roam and enjoy staying at home more.

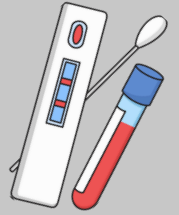
Neutering your dog or cat may reduce his metabolism. Consult your veterinarian to determine if your pet’s food intake should be adjusted accordingly.

When should my pet have the surgery?

Generally, veterinarians recommend that a female pet be spayed before her first estrus or heat period (about six months of age). Male dogs and cats can be neutered at six months of age. Under some circumstances, spay or neuter may be done when your pet is younger or old. Your veterinarian will be able to recommend the most appropriate time for your pet's surgery.

Why is pre-surgical lab work required for my pet?

Veterinarians depend on laboratory results to help them understand the status of your pet's health. When your pet is healthy, your veterinarian may want to run certain laboratory tests to establish your pet's "baseline" values. Many veterinarians also routinely request pre-surgical laboratory screening tests to help identify patients at risk of complications if given general anesthesia, which is required for spays and neuters. These tests are required for pets of all ages - even for young, seemingly healthy dogs and cats.



Heartworm Disease

What are heartworms, and how does my pet get infected?

Heartworms are parasites that invade a pet's circulatory system and heart. The adult heartworms produce offspring called microfilariae, which circulate in the infected pet's blood. Mosquitoes feed on an infected pet, serve as a host while the microfilariae mature for approximately two weeks, and then transfer infective heartworm larvae when they bite healthy pets.



These heartworm larvae migrate through the pet's tissues and circulatory system and reach the heart in five to six months, where they arrive as small worms about two inches in length. Once they are in the heart, the adult worms reproduce and grow. They may reach a length of twelve or more inches and may stay in a pet's heart for several years. In a severe infestation, a dog's heart may contain up to 300 worms.

What type of pet is most susceptible to heartworms?

Breed, sex and age do not affect your pet's susceptibility to heartworms. Dogs get heartworms much more commonly than cats, although the incidence of heartworms in cats is higher than once thought. Outdoor pets come into contact with mosquitoes more frequently than indoor pets and may be at increased risk for heartworms. The disease is found in virtually all parts of the United States and Canada.

How can I prevent heartworm disease in my pet?

Highly effective preventive medications are available for dogs and cats that are not infected and for pets that have been treated successfully for heartworms in the past. Your veterinarian may prescribe preventive medications. If your pet becomes infected, these medications will prevent heartworm larvae from developing into adult heartworms. It is crucial to administer all prescribed medications as directed. As a safeguard, your veterinarian may recommend annual screening tests - even for pets that are on heartworm preventive medicine.

What physical signs might my pet show when infected with heartworms?

There are several signs that might indicate the presence of heartworms in your pet. Talk to your veterinarian right away if your pet:

- Has sudden weight loss
- Develops a rough hair coat
- Has difficulty breathing
- Develops, a soft, persistent cough
- Tires easily
- Is listless or weak



Many of these symptoms are most noticeable after exercise. Heartworms clog the heart and/or the main blood vessels, reducing the blood supply to other organs such as the lungs and the liver. Major bodily functions, including breathing, are affected.

How is heartworm disease treated?

Your veterinarian will require a blood sample to confirm the presence of heartworms. Once this has been done, further tests may be required to determine whether your pet can tolerate heartworm treatment. These tests include, but are not limited to, blood chemistry panels, radiographs (x-rays), and electrocardiograms (EKG). If your pet is diagnosed with heartworm disease your veterinarian will talk with you about the treatment your pet needs.

Intestinal Parasites

What is an intestinal parasite?

Cats and dogs can serve as unwilling hosts to many tiny organisms that benefit from living in their intestines. Four groups of worms - roundworms, hookworms, tapeworms and whipworms - and a few species of single-cell organisms, such as coccidia and giardia, are the most common.

How does my pet become infected with intestinal parasites?

There are many ways by which your pet can become infected, including:

- Drinking contaminated water
- Coming into contact with other infected animals
- Getting bitten by fleas
- Nursing from an infected mother



What type of pet is most likely to get intestinal parasites?

Any dog or cat can become infected with intestinal parasites, but puppies and kittens are more susceptible than adult dogs and cats. Young pets can get parasites from their mothers and from living with other infected dogs or cats.

What are the signs of a parasitic infection?

Healthy, well-fed pets may have an intestinal parasite infection without showing any physical signs. However, watch for the following:

- A change in appetite
- Coughing
- Diarrhea (sometimes with blood)
- Weight loss
- Skin irritation and itching
- A rough or dry coat
- An overall poor appearance

If you suspect the presence of parasites, talk to your veterinarian immediately.

How do I know what kind of parasite my pet has?

Protozoan intestinal parasites are single-cell organisms that cannot be seen except under a microscope. Most other parasites are identified by the presence of their eggs in your pets' fecal matter (bowel movements). These eggs are too small to be seen by the naked eye. Microscopic evaluation is required before your veterinarian can make a diagnosis. Some adult worms release their eggs sporadically; therefore, several fecal samples may need to be examined to properly identify the organism.

Tapeworms are one of the few parasites that may be seen by the naked eye. The segments look like pieces of rice and appear in a bowel movement or clinging to the hair near the tail. If you notice these segments, carefully place them in a small container and take them to your veterinarian for positive identification, along with a fecal sample. Several types of worms may be involved, and it is important to identify all of them for proper treatment.



How is an infection of intestinal parasites treated?

Once the specific parasites are identified, proper treatment can begin. Your veterinarian may prescribe pills, shots, powders or liquids, and the drug will vary depending on the parasite involved. Many of the medications are easy to administer. Your veterinarian will advise you if you can give medication to your pet at home. Do not use over-the-counter deworming preparations - they are not effective against all types of parasites. Trust your veterinarian to prescribe the safest and most effective treatment for your pet.

Most treatments take only a few days; however, periodic testing is necessary to be sure that all intestinal parasites have been eliminated. A fecal sample should be examined three to four weeks after treatment. Your veterinarian may request an additional fecal sample later. In most cases, you should wash your pet's bedding and clean their living environment to prevent reinfection.

How do I keep my pet from getting intestinal parasites?

Bowel movements are the source of most intestinal parasites. To avoid parasites, keep your pet away from areas where other animals may have relieved themselves. Dispose of your own pet's feces as quickly as possible and keep your pet and their environment clean. Other ways you can protect your pet are as follows:

- o Because tapeworms infection occurs when your pet swallows a flea that has swallowed tapeworm eggs, you need to keep your pet's environment free from fleas.
- o A fecal check (a microscopic examination of your pet's feces) as part of your pet's annual wellness exam is good preventive medicine.
- o Routine, frequent fecal checks are important for predatory dogs and cats, because some types of worms are ingested when an infected rodent is eaten.
- o Puppies and pregnant dogs should be dewormed according to your veterinarian's recommendations.

Can I get intestinal parasites from my pet?

Under some conditions, intestinal parasites can be transmitted to humans. Especially at risk are children, pregnant women, and immunocompromised individuals, such as people with AIDS. Avoid walking barefoot in areas where dogs and cats defecate, such as yards, beaches, and sandboxes. Parasitic larvae can migrate through the human body and lodge in the eye, brain or other areas, which can cause blindness or other severe health problems. The danger is real - discuss the risk with your veterinarian and physician.

Housetraining your kitten

While most cats can be trained to use a litter box, it's important that you help your kitten get off to a good start. If possible, you should obtain a kitten that already has been litter box trained in its previous home. It will adapt to a new environment more quickly than a kitten that has not been trained.



The right equipment

When you get a new kitten, find out what type of litter is used in its previous home. Use the same type of litter at first, and then gradually introduce it to a new brand if necessary. Often a plastic box is the most practical and easy to clean. The sides should be low enough that your kitten can easily climb in and out. Place the box in a relatively quiet area of your home with minimal traffic, where your kitten can have some privacy. Be sure the box is easily accessible, perhaps near your kitten's sleeping area. Some kittens dislike scented litter, so it is usually best to start with unscented clay or clumping litter. If you already have cats at home, provide an additional box for each new cat. Most kittens will automatically use kitty litter in preference to other surfaces, except perhaps the soil of a potted plant with pinecones or decorative rock.

To ensure that your kitten uses its litter box every time, keep it within eyesight all the time. If it stops playing and begins sniffing around, gently carry it to the litter box. Praise any sniffing or scratching and give it loads of praise or a small food treat for eliminating. Whenever you are unable to watch your kitten, restrict it to a cat-proofed room with its litter box. Continue this for at least the first two weeks, until your kitten is using its box regularly.

Using a covered litter box can help control the odor in your home and can be helpful for kittens with poor aim. If your cat is reluctant to use a covered box, condition it to this setup by placing a large cardboard box over its litter box. Gradually decrease the size of the cardboard until it approximates the commercial box. Then make the switch.

It's a dirty job but you've got to do it

You must keep the box clean so that your kitten will return to using it. To start out, it is better to err on the side of being too fastidious about the cleaning. Scoop the box at least once daily and more often if you have time. Completely clean the entire box once a week, unless you are using a clumping littler (which might only need complete cleaning every 2 to 4 weeks). To clean the box, empty out the contents, use soap and hot water, and rinse well to remove entire soap odor.

Once you have found a brand of litter, type of box and location your kitten likes, avoid making sudden changes. If you want to change litter, place the box with the new litter in a new location, but do not take away the old litter until your kitten is using the new brand. Or try mixing the new and old brands for a few weeks.

Since it is important that your kitten feels comfortable where it eliminates, try to prevent anything unpleasant from happening when it is near its box. Don't give your cat medicine to scold it when it's near the box. Locate the box in an area free of startling noises, such as a washing machine, radiator, or furnace. If you need to keep your kitten away from children or dogs, use a baby gate or a kitty door to a quiet room.

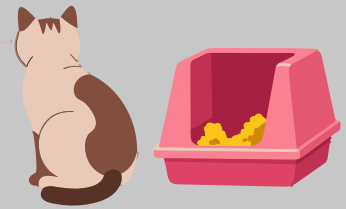
Causes for house soiling

If your kitten eliminates outside its box, it won't take long for it to develop a habit of using this undesirable area. So, it is essential that you identify and correct the cause right away.

- o Brand of litter was changed
- o Litter has scented additives or the odor of cleansers/deodorants
- o Litter boxes are not cleaned frequently enough
- o Litter box was moved to a noisy area
- o Kitten was frightened in or near the box
- o Not enough litter boxes for each cat
- o Kittens have medical problems

If the habit persists make certain that the soiled area has been thoroughly cleaned and treated with a commercial odor neutralizer. Many cats will not soil an area where their food or water is placed. To decrease the appeal of the soiled area, place a sheet of plastic carpet runner (nubs up), two-sided sticky tape, an aversive odor (perfume, deodorized soap), or a motion detector alarm in the area. Never punish your kitten for making a mess outside its litter box. Punishment usually makes things worse or creates other problems such as fear of the owner, especially if you swat your kitten or rub its nose in the mess.

If your kitten continues to eliminate out of the litter box, take it to your veterinarian. A physical exam and lab tests can make sure there are no existing medial problems. For example, bladder disease, diarrhea, and constipation can irritate your kitten when it eliminates and causes it to avoid the box.



Spraying

As kittens mature, they may begin to spray. Spraying is a form of territorial making – cats typically will urinate on vertical surfaces such as walls and furniture. Although neutering eliminates most spraying, some neutered cats do spray. If the problem persists after neutering, seek advice from your veterinarian.

Kittens are creatures of habit. Once you find a litter box location that the cat likes, stick with it.



Kittens with an Attitude

Young cats and kittens can be quite serious when it comes to playing. For felines, play prepares them to become great hunters and helps develop social skills with other cats. But when the pet treats us like big mice or when its playful pounces puncture the skin, this behavior is not fun. Although play bites are usually inhibited, swatting is often done with retracted claws, sharp teeth and nails can damage our clothing or inadvertently cause injury. The danger of serious injury increases when the behavior is directed toward the face, a family member with fragile skin, or toward someone with an immune deficiency disorder.

Play attack problems typically involve young cats that are alone during the day. The attacks escalate when they are reinforced by someone who thinks the behavior is cute and encourages this type of behavior. Besides exploration and investigation, kitten play typically involves elements of predation such as stalking, chasing, attacking, catching, and biting. Most kittens engage other kittens in rough-and-tumble play. When another feline playmate is not available, a nearby family member becomes the next-best target. Although you may be an appealing target for play, you don't have the fur, defenses, or mobility of another cat, which increases the likelihood of injuries.

Avoid training a kitty to be a terrorist. (Yes, this could be your fault!) Teasing a small kitten with your fingers and toes may seem like fun, but this will quickly change as the pet grows older and the bites become harder. To be more to your cat than a big toy, take an early stand. While some of these little guys can become quite bloodthirsty and relentless, their behavior can be controlled.

Controlling the little beast

Since play is normal behavior, it is important that the cat has an acceptable outlet for this behavior. Providing a feline playmate of the same age and temperament will usually draw the attack behavior away from you and toward the new buddy. **ONLY** consider this option if you are prepared to take on the extra care and cost that a second pet warrants. If adding another pet to the home is out of the question, then you must shoulder the responsibility for providing the proper type of play and shaping your pet's behavior.



Play interaction with the cat should involve tossing or dangling toys for it to chase and catch. This directs the attacks away from you. **DO NOT** use your own hands or feet, as this will encourage the kitten to continue its attacks on you. The more vigorous the interaction, the better. Keep your kitten so busy and worn out that it doesn't even think about going after you. Check out your local pet store and stock up on all types of fun, tempting cat toys. Or provide inexpensive toys such as ping-pong balls or unshelled walnuts for swatting. Adding catnip to the toy or stuffing or coating it with food can sometimes increase its appeal. A short fishing rod is great for casting small rubber or feather toys and provides entertainment for you and your cat. Do not use balls of yarn or other items with string when your kitten is not being monitored. If a kitten swallows a string, it could cause a very severe intestinal problem that could require expensive surgery. Always maintain control at playtime. Play that is initiated by the cat should be ignored or interrupted; you should start all play.

Being watchful vs. punishment

Physical punishment, such as swatting the pet or thumping it on the nose to stop rough play should be avoided. Punishment could cause your cat to either fear you or encourage even rougher play. A blast of air from a compressed air can (obtained from a photography or office supply store), a squirt from a water gun, or an audible alarm are safe ways to discourage the behavior. This approach is only likely to work when you can anticipate the attack and are prepared to interrupt your kitten as it begins its assault. This is not always an easy task, so attack. Attacks are most likely to occur when you're making some interesting movement, such as dusting, making the bed, reading a newspaper, or walking down the stairs.



Up all night

Nighttime attacks are more difficult to hand, and, in most cases, the only simple solution is to keep the cat out of the bedroom when you sleep at night. Cats are considered nocturnal animals, so often this is when they are the most active. As your pet grows older, this behavior will often decrease and finally stop. If the attacks are not so bad, but the kitten has the annoying habit of waking you up by sucking on earlobes or elbows while you sleep, try applying a light coat of underarm deodorant to those areas to discourage the licking. Or keep a can of compressed air nearby to deter those surprise attacks.

Family feuds

Problems with other cats in the home can occur when the play target is another cat that is weak, fearful or old, and cannot tolerate the young cat's playful behavior. The pets should be kept separate unless supervised. A water gun or noise maker (soda can filled with coins) can discourage exuberant play, and appropriate toys can keep the rambunctious cat occupied. Sometimes, the cat bearing the brunt of play attacks can become so stressed that additional help may be needed. If your older cat seems distressed, discuss this problem with your veterinarian.

Nail trimming – an ounce of prevention

Young kittens tend to use their paws a lot in play, so it's a good idea to keep those nails trimmed to prevent them from snagging sensitive skin.

To condition your cat to accept nail trimming, you must have patience and pick the right time. Don't try and start when the pet is alert and active.

(It may seem like this is always the case, but all kittens occasionally nap.)

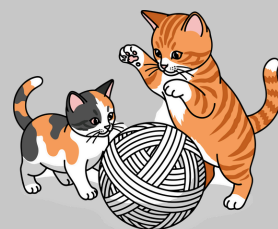
Handle the paw very gently, use a sharp pair of trimmers, and quickly take

off the tip of the nail. If the pet continues to snooze, take the tip off another nail or two.

If your cat stirs, pet it gently. Never force the pet to hold still for a nail trim and always

cease before the pet squirms. It is important that nail trimming is associated with a

positive experience, otherwise it will become very difficult to handle in the future.



Destructive Cats

Most cats, especially young kittens, have a strong, natural desire to play and explore. But this desire can lead to major problems when your cat claws your sofa and destroys your houseplants. The best way to prevent destructive scratching is by providing an environment that meets your cat's needs.

Exploration and play



The first consideration is to provide a safe, stimulating environment. Cat-proof your home and build a center where your cat can climb, perch, and scratch. Provide a few toys your cat can bat around, such as spring-mounted, dangling, or bouncy toys. Some cats enjoy climbing into empty cardboard boxes or cat carriers, especially if food treats have been left inside. Ping-Pong balls and walnuts make inexpensive toys that many cats love. Cats may even find some dog chew toys appealing. Avoid tempting your kitten into play by teasing it with your fingers – you may end up with a play-biting cat.

Indoor cats with little access to grass or other vegetable matter may chew houseplants. Offer them lettuce, catnip, or a kitty herb garden in exchange. Some cats are more likely to suck or chew on material such as rugs or clothing. You can correct the problem by keeping these objects away from your cat, providing alternative chew toys, or changing its diet to dry, bulky food.



Preventing problems

To keep your cat away from problem areas, first try child locks, barricades, or closed doors. For persistent problems or areas that cannot be barricaded, use remote punishment, taste or odor aversion, or booby traps as deterrents. Never use physical punishment – it may cause your cat fear you and to avoid the problem area only when you are around. If you can remain out of sight and use remote punishment, your cat should learn without fearing you. Use a water gun or loud noise to stop the behavior. Destructive chewing can be discouraged by using commercial anti-chew sprays, mentholated products, vinegar, or a little cayenne pepper mixed with water. Other options included aversive odors (perfume, deodorant soap, citrus oil) or bobby traps (motion-activated alarms or a stack of plastic cups set to topple when the cat enters the area or scratches.) You shouldn't punish your cat unless you have provided an alternate scratching area for it and have rewarded it for scratching there

Scratching



Scratching is a normal behavior that allows your cat to condition its claws and mark its territory. It also provided a nice stretch. Of course, when your cat's scratching is on furniture or your favorite stereo speakers, it quickly becomes intolerable.

To prevent destructive scratching, keep your cat away from tempting areas, trim its nails regularly, and provide a proper scratching post. Encourage your cat to use a scratching post by placing one near its favorite sleeping area and perhaps a second post in a prominent area. It is important to select surface textures that are both practical and appealing to the cat – carpet, sisal, a nubby fabric, or even bare wood. Attract your cat to the scratching post by attaching a few toys, rubbing a little catnip into the surface, or providing a more elaborate structure with climbing and perching areas. Give your cat a good reward whenever it scratches the post. If you prefer to build your own scratching post, ensure that the post is tall enough for your cat to scratch with its legs fully extended and is sturdy enough to support your cat's weight without toppling. You can leave the wood bare or cover it with suitable surface covering. You can construct an inexpensive post by securely attaching a fireplace log to a plywood base.



Persistent problems

If your cat continues to scratch in an inappropriate area, put a post there. Food rewards will keep your cat interested in the post and away from your furniture. If destructive scratching persists, cover the scratched area with plastic, a loosely draped piece of material, or short strips of double-sided sticky tape. Another option is to use plastic coverings that fit over your cat's nails. These are available from your veterinarian.

If you have sincerely tried to solve the problem but still encounter destructive scratching, declawing may be a final consideration. It is certainly a better alternative than banning your cat to outdoors or taking it to an animal shelter (which may be unable to place the cat in another home). Numerous studies have shown that declawing does not have a detrimental effect on a cat's behavior or personality.

