

EVER WONDER WHY.....?

**By Laura Speirs
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My cat has a zillion toys but won't play with them. Why is this?

Play in cats mimics the hunt and the kill. The toys you have lying on the floor are essentially dead prey to your cat, so it's no wonder he wouldn't think they are interesting. Cats much prefer interactive toys such as feathers, streamers or other small things on a string attached to a pole or chasing a laser light beam (be sure it never points at your cat's eyes). When playing with the feather toy, be sure to let your cat capture it from time to time so he doesn't become frustrated. Adding catnip to playtime will enhance the experience for some cats. Cats hear 4-5 times better than humans and may not like toys with bells because it hurts their sensitive ears. Be sure to make time each day for some playtime with your cat. It's great exercise and a stress reliever for him.

My cat couldn't care less about catnip. What's going on?

Your cat is one of the approximately 30% of cats that did not receive the gene that allows them to react to catnip. For your cat, this is normal and not unusual at all!

I'd like to put my litter box in the garage. Do you think that's a good place for it?

That depends. Do you use your garage for your car? Are there any petroleum products, insecticides, antifreeze, or other hazards in there? Will you forget to clean the box daily since it's out of sight? If you answered "No" to all of these questions, then the garage is safe for your cat and her box. Correct placement of the litter box is important for your cat's compliance in using it. Some cats won't use their litter box if it's too far away from where they hang out and may not like it in the garage or a basement. It should be easily accessible to her, clean, in a quiet place away from dogs and children, and preferably on a hard surface for easy cleaning.

My cat will be purring and enjoying my petting her and then bite me without warning. Why would she want to hurt me?

This common reaction in some cats mystifies owners. Be assured that this is NOT personal! Some cats become overly stimulated by too much petting and will strike suddenly. Or at some point what once was pleasurable becomes uncomfortable when done too much. Also, a subtle static electric charge may be building up as you pet her that she finds unpleasant. If your cat does this behavior, watch her body language *very carefully* for signs she's had enough (tail or skin twitching, ears flattening, stiffening of muscles, dilated pupils). It may be wise to pet her less to make it a pleasant experience every time. Don't take it personally! Your cat isn't mad at you. She's just reacting to stimuli that she finds annoying.

Is it okay to leave dry food out for my cat all the time?

There are two schools of thought on this issue. One says that to feed twice a day on a schedule more closely approximates life in the wild and is better for the cat. The other says that, as long as your cat is not obese and self-regulates his eating, it is fine to leave the food out. Some cats, that have been strays and didn't know where their next meal was coming from, may gorge their food and even vomit afterwards. Most cats in a home will calm down about their food over time and eat normally when they see that they don't have to worry about it anymore. Since many cats are grazers and eat small amounts several times a day, free feeding is best for them. To keep your cat healthy, always be sure to feed him a high quality food, without by-products, that is appropriate for his lifestyle and age.

Why does my microchipped, indoor cat need to wear a collar and ID tag?

Unfortunately, despite our best efforts, accidents do happen and your cat may get outside and be lost. No one thinks it will happen to them, but shocked, heartbroken people call shelters every day telling them that, after years of never getting out, their beloved cat is gone and had no ID. A lot of people have never heard of a microchip and wouldn't even know to have your cat checked for one if he were found by them. So, your best, first line of defense is also to have ID on your cat that says *his name, "Indoor Cat", and your phone number*. Some cat owners worry that their cat may get hung on something, but most cat collars are now designed so that cats can get out of them if they get caught. Using these two forms of identification **together** maximizes the chances that you'll be reunited with your lost cat. Don't take chances. Get ID on your cat TODAY!

I'm out of the house for long hours every day and I'm afraid my cat is lonely. Should I get her a buddy?

It might be a very good idea! Most cats enjoy and benefit from the company of another, compatible cat or dog. Matching a new cat to your resident feline can be tricky. For instance, your senior cat will probably not appreciate the unruly energy of a kitten, so another adult, whose temperament more closely matches that of your senior, would be a better fit. I usually find that, if you have a resident female, a new male cat or kitten would be your best choice. With a resident male, either a male or female cat would be a good match in most cases. Until then, it might help your cat to play a radio *very softly* on the classical or easy listening station while you're away from home. Don't forget to make the time you're home count for your cat by regularly playing with him.

Don't all male cats spray?

NOT AT ALL!! This is a commonly held **misconception**, about male cats, from people having observed unneutered tom cats doing this behavior outside. Spraying in neutered males, especially males that were neutered within the first year of life, is quite rare. In

fact, shelters report hearing from cat owners wanting to surrender their female cats because of inappropriate urination much more often than they ever do about spraying males! And if you didn't know this, some females spray, too.

Spraying is a *territorial marking behavior* driven by testosterone in male cats. Once neutered, the testosterone is no longer produced and the behavior usually disappears. Occasionally, a long-time, outdoor cat neutered at a late age will continue this behavior after neutering because it is a deeply engrained pattern. So, if you've rejected male cats in the past because of this idea, you're missing out on knowing some wonderful and extremely affectionate animals!

I've heard that there are certain personality traits associated with a cat's color or gender. Explain.

Yes, it's true that we observe *general* trends in cats. For instance, we often see that orange and tuxedo male cats tend almost always to be extremely sweet and adaptable cats. After that, the black cats and tabbies seem nicest. White cats with blue eyes tend to be very dominant while those with green eyes are less so. In almost all cases the female cats will be dominant and rule the roost. This is why it's often better to pair a female cat with a male cat that will surrender top cat position to the female and live harmoniously. Two neutered males will also do better together in many cases than two females, unless they have grown up together.

It is well known that calico and tortoise shell cats (always female) are the most dominant of all the female cats. These beautiful cats love being the "only child" and often will bond with one adult. They are generally intolerant of small children.

There are many more fascinating traits seen in other breeds of cats, but these are the most common. I want to stress again that **these are general trends and not the case with every cat**. Knowing these things may help you choose your next cat or explain what you've observed in your own cat.

How often should I trim my cat's claws? Do I really need to?

Adult, indoor cats need their nails trimmed at least once a month, while kittens' grow faster and it should be done every other week. Most cats tolerate this well and we recommend it for the sake of your furniture and your skin! It's rare that our cats will deliberately scratch us, but it happens often by accident, such as when the cat is on your lap and takes a flying leap. Occasionally, the nails of some cats will actually grow so long that they curl around, pierce the pads of their feet and keep on growing! This is a graphic example of nails that have been neglected by owners. The outer sheaths of cat nails are usually shed while using the scratching post. Some nails of older cats, that don't regularly scratch, will appear large and thickened because of this sheath. It is all the more important to take care of this area of grooming for them.

Sometimes my cats fight. What's the best way to break them up?

The first rule is NEVER, EVER get physically in the middle of a cat fight or cats that are threatening to fight. You will almost surely get bitten and that can be very dangerous. I don't recommend throwing water on them as you might have heard. That will only inflame the situation. I recommend getting a broom and *sweeping them apart*.

Sometimes just brandishing the broom will be enough, but getting them safely apart is the aim. Once you've swept them into different areas, preferably ones with doors you can close, and leave the cat there for a while to decompress. After a period apart, you can usually let them be together again. They will probably have forgotten about whatever upset them before. If not and the fighting is chronic, you may need to follow a period of segregation and slow reintegration over time just like when you first bring a new cat into the home.

My cat uses the litter box but sometimes "misses" and does it outside the box. What can I do?

You really have to admire a cat for even *using* a litter box in the first place since, in the wild, the world is their litter box! A cat prefers a box that is *one and a half times the length of his own body*. With that in mind, you can see that most litter boxes are actually way too small to comfortably accommodate a cat.

Here are two solutions: If your cat isn't all that large and uses an open box, changing it to a hooded box may help your cat with "boundaries." If you have a large cat, I would suggest buying an under-the-bed sweater box at a discount store and fill that with litter. If your big cat urinates high and doesn't squat, buying a similar, high-sided container to act as a litter box would work great. You will need to cut an opening in one end for the cat to enter. Using a larger box should do the trick!

How do I find a good cat sitter or cat boarding facility?

This is a very important concern to pet owners. Deciding which kind of care you want for your cat while you're away is first. Some people prefer cat sitters that come to the home while others prefer a cat boarding situation where the cat stays away. Each has its pros and cons. If you have only one cat and will be gone more than three days, I'd recommend a cat boarding facility that does use cages, or, if it does, gives your cat time out of the cage daily. Another consideration is that some places will board dogs and cats in close proximity and that is extremely stressful for the cat. Using a cat sitter, that comes into your home, works well when you have multiple cats that will be company for each other. Otherwise, your cat will be left alone for at least 23 hours a day and that also is stressful for him or her.

Whatever your choice is, make sure you thoroughly check the cat boarding facility in person, and interview the cat sitter you're considering hiring. Make sure you check all references. Your veterinarian usually has names of cat sitters to offer. You can also find multiple websites of cat boarding options and cat sitters in your area.

Do cats really see in the dark?

In the true absence of light cats cannot see. They do, however, have much keener sight than we do in darkness. Their eyesight seems best at recognizing movement which helps them to catch prey. It may surprise you to know that a cat's sense of smell (at least 40 times greater than human's) and its hearing (5 times greater) are its most important senses. This is why using scented litter or toys with bells may repel some cats.