

Spraying

Having a cat that sprays can be a very unpleasant problem to deal with. When a cat sprays they back up to a vertical surface with their tail erect and squirt a very pungent substance. Often, their tail will quiver in the process. Spraying is far more common in male cats, but female cats can spray, too. A cat may spray for a number of reasons. A lot of information is communicated in their spray. It tells them what cats in the area are sexually receptive, and aids in finding sexual partners. Outdoor cats are able to “timeshare” an area without conflict because they are able to “read” who has been there and when, then adjust their use of that area to reduce chance encounters. Cats also spray to self-soothe in times of anxiety by marking things with a familiar scent. Understanding the reasons cats spray can help us to reduce this behaviour.



Visit your veterinarian

If your cat is spraying, and has not been spayed or neutered, this should be your first step. One study found that 10% of neutered males, and 5% of spayed females regularly sprayed¹. Even if your cat is not spayed or neutered, a trip to the veterinarian might be warranted. This is especially true if your cat is showing signs of stress (described below). Behaviour medications may be recommended to help manage event-based stress or chronic anxiety.

Reducing the behaviour

If your cat has been spayed or neutered but continues to spray, it is likely to be the result of stress.

Watch body language

It is crucial that you learn to identify when your cat is experiencing fear, anxiety, or stress, and respond appropriately. Signs can vary between cats, but common ones are included below. See [Feline Body Language](#) for more information!

- Large pupils
- Ears to the side/back
- Tail tucked/tight to body
- Hissing/growling/yowling
- Hair standing on end
- Lip licking (when not eating)
- Leaning away/crouching/tense body posture
- Rolling on back with feet ready to strike, or feet tucked under with paws on the ground, ready to flee

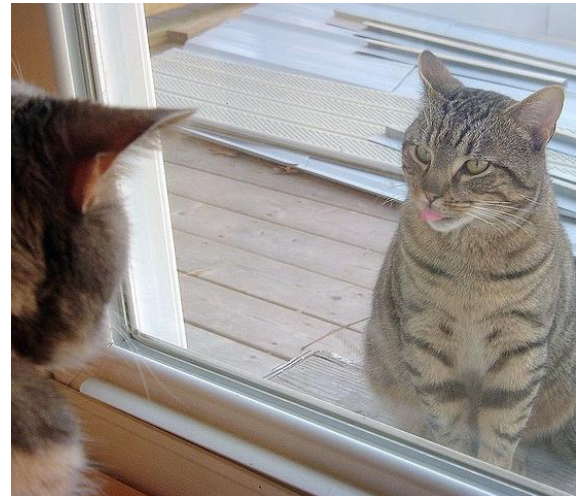


Identify the source of the stress

Take note of where in your home your cat is spraying, and what happened immediately before, if possible. If your cat sprays around the outside of your home (especially near the doors or windows) it is likely the source of their stress is coming from outside (e.g., a raccoon or another cat). If they are spraying around the center of their home, it is likely the source of the stress is something inside your house (e.g., boredom or a tense relationship with another pet). If spraying commonly happens after a specific event (e.g., a particular family member comes home), it is likely the stress is linked to that.

Stress from outside of the house

If you suspect that your cat's spraying may be triggered by something they are seeing out a window, you can discourage animals from your property (by using humane deterrents, removing bird feeders, and keeping your garbage secure) or prevent your cat from seeing out the windows (try decorative, translucent window film).



Stress from inside the house

If your cat is stressed by something inside your house, this could be because something is scaring them or because of boredom. Here are a couple of techniques that can be used to help resolve these issues:

- **Repair relationships.** Whether another pet or a human roommate, repairing relationships can often be completed by gradually reintroducing them in combination with something the cat likes (e.g., treats or play). Ensure the introduction is done so slowly that your cat does not go above their threshold (i.e., they do not exhibit the behaviours indicative of fear, anxiety, and stress outlined above). See [Inter-Cat Aggression](#) and [Introducing Your New Cat to Your Resident Cat](#) for more information.
- **Provide a regular routine.** Research shows that a regular routine can reduce stress in cats². If cats know when to anticipate certain activities, this can reduce the anxiety caused by uncertainty over what will happen next. Ensure you provide events that are important to your cat (meals, play, training, etc.) at consistent times of day.
- **Enrich your home.** Enriching your home helps to ensure a cat is provided with everything they need to exhibit their normal range of behaviours – this includes behaviours that might help them cope with fear, AND behaviours that will keep them from getting bored. Ensure your home is equipped with opportunities for your cat to hide, perch, scratch, and play. Consider offering meals in a puzzle feeder, as well. See [Enriching Your Home](#) for more information!
- **Play therapy and trick training.** Ensure you play with your cat for at least 20 minutes at a regularly scheduled time every day. Follow your cat's lead and match your playstyle to their preferences – but try to encourage activity to help maximize the stress relieving benefits of play. Consider training your cat tricks as well. Clicker training uses positive reinforcement and gives the cat a feeling of control over the interaction, which is VERY useful in reducing stress in cats. See [Trick Training Your Cat](#) for more information!
- **Pheromone therapy.** Feliway™ is a synthetic feline facial pheromone thought to have a calming effect on cats. There is some debate as to whether or not it works³, but some owners claim that it has dramatically reduced their cat's spraying.



Clean with enzymatic cleaner

Once a spot in your house smells like cat spray, your cat is likely to revisit and spray there again. Clean places where your cat has sprayed with an enzymatic cleaner. These will clean residue and destroy odors at a molecular level, making it less likely for your cat to revisit that spot to spray again.

Do not punish

It is important that you do not punish this behaviour. This may strengthen any feelings of fear your cat may have or damage your bond with your cat.

References:

¹Hart, B. L., & Cooper, L. (1984). Factors relating to urine spraying and fighting in prepubertally gonadectomized cats. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, 184(10), 1255-1258.

²Carlstead, K., Brown, J. L., & Strawn, W. (1993). Behavioral and physiological correlates of stress in laboratory cats. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 38(2), 143-158.

³Frank, D., Beauchamp, G., & Palestrini, C. (2010). Systematic review of the use of pheromones for treatment of undesirable behavior in cats and dogs. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, 236(12), 1308-1316.

