

FACTSHEET

Unwanted furniture scratching

Why does my cat scratch the furniture?

Cats scratch objects for a number of reasons. Firstly, they are marking their territory. You may notice your cat scratches the furniture or carpet more when visitors are at your home or if they notice another cat in your garden. Cats have scent glands in the pads of their feet and every time they scratch the furniture it leaves a pheromone or smell, undetectable to the human nose, that lets other animals know they have been there. The physical scratch marks also let other animals know the cat has been there. You may even notice they display the behaviour more if you have just cleaned up, as the smell of cleaners and deodorisers may be masking the scent they originally left.

Cats also need to maintain their nails. Contrary to popular belief, cats are not sharpening their claws when they scratch – the scratching helps to break away any dead nail that may be loose. Every four to six weeks, your cat's nails will shed. The dead part of the nail will fall away, and the new nail will be underneath. Sometimes the dead nail needs help to come away from the new nail, so your cat will scratch to do this. Preventing your cat from carrying out this necessary behaviour could lead to nail infections, so it's very important to provide an acceptable outlet for them to do this.

Scratching is also a great way to stretch the tendons in their paws, which to cats can feel like a massage.

How can I stop my cat scratching the furniture?

Your cat needs somewhere to scratch. Provide your cat with a few scratch posts and if you notice your cat going to scratch the furniture, gently pick up your cat and place them at the scratch post. Be consistent and place them at the scratch post **every time** you notice them scratching the furniture or carpet. If possible, have a number of scratch posts around the house; this will give your cat a few options other than your furniture. Never yell at them or show aggressive behaviour to them when they are scratching where you don't want them to as this may cause other behavioural issues. Scratch towers and activity centres can also be a great option, depending on how much space you have in the home.

Consider the location of the scratching post: if you notice your cat using a specific side of your lounge or piece of carpet, then this is the ideal spot for the post. The post should be visible and in a location the cat frequents. A post that is hidden away is unlikely to be used. Most cats enjoy tall scratch posts that allow them to stretch upwards; the post should be sturdy so the cat can put pressure on it without unbalancing the post. Alternatively, some cats will prefer to be on all four paws when they scratch. If this is the case, a post that includes a flat scratching surface is ideal. It is also important to consider the texture or fabric of the post, as cats can have individual preferences. Some options may include carpet, sisal rope, corrugated cardboard and seagrass rope.

In multi-cat households, you will need to provide multiple scratch posts to prevent territorial or guarding behaviours.

It is important to encourage your cat to use their scratching post and reward them when they do the right thing. To entice them onto the post, you could try spraying or rubbing some catnip on the scratch post. You could also dangle teaser toys or use a laser pointer to make the post exciting and encourage them to grab hold of the post to get accustomed to the texture. When your cat uses the scratching post, it is important to offer them a positive reward. This will help them create a positive association with the post. Positive rewards will vary from cat to cat, but can include happy praise, pats, food treats or even a grooming session with a cat brush. You can even try placing a few of their favourite treats on the base of the post to encourage them to use it.

Always remember to account for the extra treats given during training sessions when feeding your cat their daily meals so as not to overfeed your cat.

If you suspect a new or stray cat is outside and causing the unwanted scratching behaviour, for example if your lounge is near a window and your cat looks out the window and then scratches the lounge straight away, you may need to try some calming medication for your cat like calming treats, 'Zylkene' or 'Feliway'.

You might want to clip your cat's nails. Be careful if you choose to do this, as your cat has blood vessels in the nail. It is best if a vet or vet nurse demonstrates the process for you the first time, as it's very important you only cut off the sharp tip to avoid hurting your cat. Clipping the nails will not stop your cat scratching; it will only lessen the damage done. You will need to clip the nails every week as the nail gets sharp again very quickly.

Products like 'Sticky Paws', a sticky pad that can be placed on your furniture, may also be useful as your cat may not like the feel of the sticky pad so will stop using that area.

It is worth experimenting with placing covers or blankets over furniture. Loose covers can make it more difficult for your cat to establish a 'grip' but some cats will simply get under the coverings and still scratch the furniture. Try placing small rugs that you are happy for your cat to scratch in locations where they like to scratch.

Be patient with your cat: they are displaying a natural and necessary behaviour. Preventing them from doing so can cause further behavioural and/or health problems, so it is very important to provide them with an acceptable outlet for this behaviour.

While all care has been taken in preparing this document, it is intended to provide general information only and should not be taken as constituting professional advice. Mention of a product or business does not mean endorsement by Cat Protection.