



FACTSHEET

Spraying Behaviour

It is important to realise that 'spraying' and 'urinating' in cats are two very different behaviours. Spraying is displayed when a cat senses their territory is threatened. In order to re-establish their territory, they will spray. Urinating is the normal toileting behaviour.

As soon as you notice your cat has started spraying you should have your cat vet checked, as a number of urinary tract infections can cause this behaviour. Urinary tract infections are very painful and can also be extremely dangerous.

Understanding spraying behaviour

Every cat, whether indoors or outdoors, will establish their territory. They will do this by leaving a scent that is not necessarily detectable to humans but will be noticed by any other cat in the area. The cat will leave this scent in a number of ways:

- Scratching an area, leaving an obvious mark as well as leaving a scent omitted by the scent pads in the paws
- Rubbing on an area with their cheeks and hindquarters, leaving a scent from the scent glands in each of these areas
- Spraying a fine mist of concentrated urine on an area

Spraying can be distinguished from urinating by looking at the cat's body language. Spraying behaviour is always done when the cat is standing upright. The cat will back up to an object with their tail raised. The tail will stay fully upright and will shake. The fur on the tail might be raised also. A spray or jet of potent smelling urine will be omitted from the anus. This spray is used to mark an area that the cat wants other cats to know is theirs.

Both male and female cats can show spraying behaviours, although it is more common in males. Cats will not start spraying until they reach sexual maturity (around 4 months) and for most cats, early-age desexing prevents spraying behaviour from ever developing. Cats start spraying as a way to establish their territory and will do this every time they feel their territory is under threat. This threat may be a new cat smell, a new person smell, or even a new piece of furniture. The behaviour will usually stop once the cat is reassured their territory is re-established.

Stopping your cat from spraying

It is very important to ensure your cat is desexed. In most cases, desexing will stop the behaviour. In some cases the behaviour will continue, especially if your cat was older when desexed (and so the behaviour had become entrenched).

After desexing, the smell of the urine spray will be almost undetectable, or the cat may act as if they are spraying with no actual urine being omitted. This is known as a 'dry spray'. Try to monitor when your cat displays the behaviour so you can establish why the behaviour has occurred.

When your cat has sprayed in an area it is very important to clean the area thoroughly with a non-bleach product. Try using an odour neutralising product like 'Biozet' to remove the smell and to stop your cat from being attracted to the area again. You can also try using a citrus scented product as a deterrent; most cats don't like the smell of citrus. There are many products available for all types of surfaces, look for ones that say odour neutralising on the label.

Try to re-establish a routine so the cat feels less confronted. You could consider using a pheromone spray or diffuser such as 'Feliway' throughout the house for a short time until your cat is relaxed again or other calming interventions such as 'Zylkene' or calming treats. Keep in mind cats are masters of disguising when they are stressed so you may need to keep a diary of when your cat shows this behaviour to get to the bottom of what is causing it to happen. You might need to consider constructing physical barriers (e.g. cat-proof fencing) if the problem is triggered by stray or neighbourhood cats coming into your cat's garden.

Most importantly never reprimand your cat for displaying this behaviour. It is a normal cat behaviour and they are only doing what comes naturally to them. By reprimanding them you may cause further behavioural issues.

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