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# Cat Behavior

Cat behavior generally refers to the behaviors and habits of domestic cats, including body language and communication. Cat behavior may vary among breeds and individual cats. Many common behaviors include hunting techniques and reactions to certain events as well as interactions with humans and other animals, such as dogs. Communication can vary greatly depending on a cat's temperament. In a family with multiple cats, social position can also affect behavior patterns with others. A cat's eating patterns can also vary depending on the owner's choice of food or eating times/quantities. In the case of a family having two or more cats, one cat may become dominant over the other cats.

## Body language[]

Cats rely strongly on body language to communicate.

* Disgust — The lifting or constant shaking of a paw or paws. The more times the paw is shaken, the stronger the cat's feeling; this can sometimes be a four paw affair with each paw being lifted and shaken in turn. This behavior is possibly related to the identical action displayed after stepping into water. Displeasure at a situation can be shown by moving the ears back and rapidly swishing the tail.Agitation or Aggression — the swishing or sweeping of the tail in a wide swath, in mid-air or against a person. Tail flicking indicates inner conflict, while wide tail swishing shows external conflict. Further irritation may result in the cat moving or leaving the room and even physical aggression.Contentedness — Kneading with the paws on a person or, for example, a favorite blanket or sleeping spot. Young kittens knead their mother's nipples to stimulate the feeding reflex so that her milk flows. Cats may knead for a short or extended period of time; the extended period is sometimes interpreted by people as a sign of discomfort or restlessness, but it is more likely that the cat is happy. Most cats will demonstrate this for about ten minutes at the longest, although some have been known to knead and suckle on their favorite human's shirt or ear lobe over the course of an entire night. Researchers at Oxford University have demonstrated that cats derive immense pleasure from kneading, similar to the relaxing sensation for humans from snacking on favorite foods or being massaged.
* Relaxation — sprawling on the side or back and, possibly, rolling about; this may be seen, for example, when a person enters the room or stirs from their seat. Sometimes they roll over onto their back and shake their paws in the air. This behavior shows complete relaxation. The cat may display this at the same time as the person's movement.Affection — a pressing of the face or top of the head against a person's body (head rubbing, nuzzling), leaving a scent to mark the cat's territory; or rubbing in quick succession. Cats may also blink slowly as an expression of affection or security. Many cats also use a question mark-shaped tail to show desire to greet someone they are fond of. They will also stretch to show they are content with their surroundings. Cats may also lick their owner or another person to show affection.Submission — Upon being approached, it will fall down on its side, indicating it is not seeking attention and is unwilling to put up a fight.Interest and Rejection — The position of the ears communicates the degree of desire to engage with the situation around them. Ears up and moved slightly forward shows real interest in what is going on, while ears moved backward shows distaste and desire to not engage with the situation. Cats show disapproval by moving their ears back, an equivalent of a human frown. They also crouch and turn their back to the situation to indicate disinterest or unhappiness. A cat will either move a little or give a faint "meow" if it does not want to be picked up.Desire for Attention — To solicit attention (for food or affection) from humans, cats will rub their bodies against the human's legs with back arched and tail raised. Less often, a cat may reach out and touch a human with its forepaw to get attention.

## Scent rubbing and spraying[]

This behavior is used primarily to claim ownership of something, although unlike male cats, female cats do not usually spray. Some spayed females may spray to mimic males, but do not have enough scent to mark. Once male cats are neutered the scent rubbing or spraying will, in most cases, decrease or stop. Some male cats continue to spray if not neutered early enough. Intact female cats can also spray due to moodiness and stress caused by the heat cycles.

## Courting[]

Cats, compared to many other mammals, have a unique courting style. The first step in courtship is the female coming into season, or "heat". Male cats will be able to smell a female cat in heat miles away and will therefore seek her out. Males will fight mercilessly for the right to be the first to mate with the female. After the dominant male has left, the less dominant males will then each mate with the female in turn. It is therefore possible that even if a male cat loses first breeding rights, he can still be the father. This is also the reason that a litter of kittens can have two or sometimes even three fathers.

## Vocal calls[]

* Purring — Purring is often a sign of contentment. Some cats purr when they are in extreme pain, or in labor, simply to try to calm themselves down. Purring therefore can be a sign of pleasure or pain; usually it is the former. Scientists have not yet been able to discover how purring works, but it is suspected that it is caused by minute vibrations in the voice box.Greeting — A particular sort of vocalization, such as a low meow or chirp, possibly with simultaneous purring.Distress — Mewing is a plea for help or attention often made by kittens. There are two basic types of this call, one more loud and frantic, the other more high-pitched. In older cats it is more of a panicky repeated meow.Attention — Often simple meows and mews in both older cats and young kittens. A commanding meow is a command for attention, food, or to be let out.Protest — Whining meows.Frustration — A strong sigh or exhaled snort.Happy]] — A meow that starts low then goes up and comes back down.Watching/Interest — Cats will often "chatter" or "chirrup" on seeing something of interest. This is sometimes attributed to mimicking birdsong to attract prey or draw others' attention to it, but often birds are not present.

## Panting[]

Unlike dogs, panting is an uncommon occurrence in cats. However, some cats can pant after brisk play or in times of stress, such as a car ride. Most commonly cats will pant in response to environmental changes, such as anxiety, fear, excitement, or heat. However, if panting is excessive or the cat appears in distress, it becomes important to identify the underlying cause, as panting may be a symptom of a more serious condition, such as a nasal blockage, heartworm disease, head trauma, or drug poisoning. In particular, the cat's owner should look for signs of immediate distress such as coughing, difficulty breathing, or blue color to the mucus membranes. Other problems, such as fatigue, weight loss, poor appetite, excessive drinking, vomiting, or diarrhea, may also be present. If the panting appears to be in response to normal events such as exercise, excitement, heat or fear, the owner should remove the stimulation and continue to observe his or her pet. If panting continues, the owner should consult a veterinarian. Pregnant cats often pant when going into labor.

## Righting reflex[]

The righting reflex is the ability for cats to land on their feet with little or no injury. They can do this more easily than other animals due to their flexible spine and lack of a collar bone. Cats also use vision and/or their vestibular apparatus to help tell which way to turn. They then can stretch themselves out and relax their muscles. Cats do not always land unharmed. They can break bones or die from excessive falls.

## Food eating patterns[]

Cats are obligate carnivores, and can survive without vegetation. Felines in the wild will usually hunt smaller mammals regularly throughout the day to keep themselves nourished. Domestic cats, however, are used to a relaxed lifestyle and, therefore, will eat even smaller amounts, but more regularly. Many cats will find and chew small quantities of long grass but this is not for its nutritional value, it is a purely mechanical function. The eating of grass triggers a regurgitation reflex to help expel indigestible matter, like hairballs and the bones of prey.

## Food covering[]

Cats scratch at the ground around food to cover it, for three reasons. First, it makes the food less visible to others, reducing its chances of being taken. Second, it keeps insects off the food. Third, it slows the food's drying out by excluding sun and air circulation.

Too much covering will tend to make food mold; not enough covering will dry out food. Thus the covering behavior varies according to the condition of the food, with food sometimes being well covered, sometimes lightly covered, and sometimes completely uncovered.

## Socialization[]

Kittens are naturally scared of people at first, but if handled and well cared for in the first 16 weeks, they will develop trust in the humans who care for them. To decrease the odds of a cat being unsocial or hostile towards humans, kittens should be socialized at an early age.

It is a challenge to socialize an adult feral cat. Socialized adult feral cats tend to trust only those people they have learned over time can be trusted, and can be very fearful around strangers.

Cats can be extremely friendly companions. The strength of the cat-human bond is mainly correlated with how much consideration is given to the cat's feelings by his human companion. The formula for a successful relationship thus has much in common with human to human relationships.

Some people regard cats as sneaky, shy, or aloof animals. Cats have an inherent distrust for predator species such as humans, and often seek to minimize any contact with people they do not perceive as trustworthy. Feline shyness and aggression around people with cat social skills is often a result of lack of socialization, abuse or neglect. Cats relate to humans differently than more social animals, enjoying some time on their own each day as well as time with humans.

Cats have a strong 'escape' instinct. Attempts to corner, capture or herd a cat can thus provoke powerful fear-based escape behavior. Socialization greatly reduces the number of humans that a cat will respond to in this way. Socialization is a process of learning that many humans can be trusted.

There is a widespread belief that relationships between dogs and cats are problematic. However, both species can develop amicable relationships by reading each other's body language correctly. The animals can better read each other's language when they first encountered each other at a young age, due to the fact that they are learning to communicate simultaneously. The order of adoption may also cause significant differences in their relationship. Sometimes the dog may be simply looking to play with the cat while the cat may take the approach a lot more seriously and lash out with its sharp claws causing painful injury. Such an incident may cause an irreversible animosity between the cat and dog.

## See also[]

* Cat communicationCat play and toys

## References[]