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# SITS & WIGGLES

The Newsletter of the Animal Clinic of Chardon

WHAT'S INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

*Why Does My Cat Scratch?*

*What Your Cat's Eyes Tell You About His Emotions*

*Angel Fund Virtual Fundraiser*



## WHY DOES MY CAT SCRATCH?

It can be frustrating and even expensive if your cat scratches your furniture or carpets. However, it is important to understand that scratching is a normal behavior for all cats, and serves important functions as well.

### Cats Scratch for a Variety of Reasons

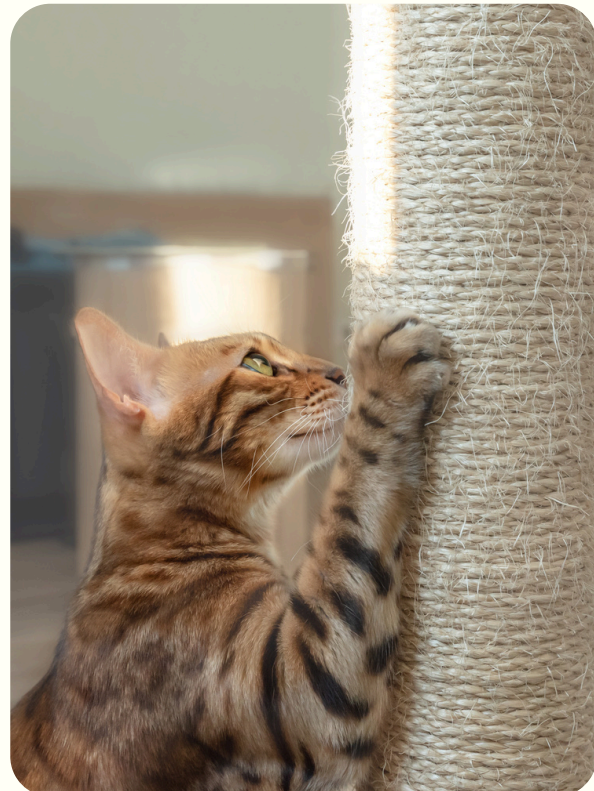
- To maintain the necessary claw motion used in hunting and climbing, as well as a way to stretch their body.
- A means of communication between cats, leaving both scent and visible markers to demonstrate that this is their territory.
- To keep their nails well-groomed, remove the old nail sheaths, and expose the new nail growth inside.

So, instead of trying to get your cat to stop scratching, train her to use a scratching post or cat tree that is acceptable to you – and your cat!

### Other Important Tips to Keep in Mind

#### Regular nail trimming

By regularly trimming your cat's nails, you can prevent injury and damage to household items. (continued on next page)



## WHY DOES MY CAT SCRATCH? (CONTINUED)

### **Synthetic facial pheromone sprays/diffusers**

If your cat continues to scratch on undesired objects, she may be stressed, anxious, seeking attention, or indicating that she does not feel secure in her environment. Anxiety can be intensified by punishment, which can cause your cat to increase her undesired scratching behavior. Consider trying synthetic facial pheromone sprays and/or diffusers to help relieve your cat's anxiety or stress.

- First, make sure to clean the objects or areas with soap and water to remove the communication marking scents left by your cat's paws.
- Then apply the product on objects or areas in your home where your cat has exhibited undesired scratching.
- Apply daily comforting pheromones to help prevent your cat's need to mark these areas again. The product should **not** be sprayed on the desired scratcher you want your cat to use.

### **Appropriate environmental enrichment**

Make sure you provide your cat with an enriching environment so she has appropriate objects to scratch and play with in your home. Destructive scratching can occur if your cat's needs have not been fully met.

### **Temporary synthetic nail caps**

These can be glued over your cat's nails and usually need to be reapplied every 4-6 weeks, therefore they may be a less desirable alternative to the other methods listed here.

### **Rewards and positive reinforcement**

Remember that your cat learns best through positive reinforcement. As you are redirecting your cat to use her new scratching post or pad, make sure you give your cat a reward immediately (within 3 seconds) to reinforce the positive behavior. It is important to remember that you need to find a reward that your cat likes. Examples include treats, catnip, interactive play, and petting or grooming.

Continued scratching by cats may be related to stress, anxiety, attention seeking, or perceived lack of security in their environment. Please speak with your veterinarian to discuss your concerns, advice for your cat's situation, and to develop an appropriate plan for your household.



To learn more about alternatives to declawing, visit <https://catvets.com/public/PDFs/ClientBrochures/AlternativesDeclawing-WebView.pdf>

# WHAT YOUR CAT'S EYES TELL YOU ABOUT HIS EMOTIONS

We've heard it before—cats are not small dogs. They differ in nutritional requirements, training techniques, and body language. People often find feline communication more difficult to interpret than that of dogs because it can be so subtle that nonverbal communication cues are completely missed or misinterpreted. Misreading a cat can land us on the wrong end of sharp claws and teeth.

Learning to interpret understated feline body language enables us to avert calamity and strengthen our bond. Cats have a refined way of communicating between themselves and humans using primarily their body, tail, and facial features. Each blink, twitch, and flick communicates a meaning ranging from “I'm okay, you're okay,” to “Back off, buster!” to “Affectionately, yours.”



Among the most expressive parts of the feline body are the orbs of vision. Let's decipher the emotions hidden in the windows of the soul, the eyes.

## Mesmer-eyes

Whether they are blue, green, or gold, round, oval, or almond-shaped, your cat's eyes communicate emotions through physiological changes in pupil size and eyelid position. A cat's pupils can shrink to the narrowest of slits or widen into black pools. Eyelids may be fully open, partially closed, or drawn into a squint.

Causes for these changes may be emotional arousal, such as fear, aggression, pleasure, or excitement, or environmental, such as a change in ambient light levels. Think of it like a silent movie: the autonomic nervous system is the director, the pupil plays the lead role, the eyelid is a supporting character, while other facial features, body, and tail comprise the remaining cast. The surrounding environment sets the stage.

## Eyes Wide Open

Alert, wide-open eyes signal trust. In friendly greetings, pupils are at normal dilation. The eyelids may be squinty, brows are soft, and the cat may offer cheek rubs. Accept this as a sign of love and trust.

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***“If you don't own a dog, at least one, there is not necessarily anything wrong with you, but there may be something wrong with your life.” - Roger Caras***

**No ACOC Birthdays, but we wish you Happy Holidays!**



# WHAT YOUR CAT'S EYES TELL YOU ABOUT HIS EMOTIONS

## **Unblinking Stare**

When a cat starts to show interest, the eyes look more directly with an unblinking stare at the object, person, or animal of interest, and the pupils dilate slightly. The general message is "I know you're there and I don't want a fight." But the unblinking stare is also a communication megaphone for wanna-be aggressive cats to adversaries. This is an important control message in multi-cat households with limited resources such as food, water, litter box, toys, and territory. People often miss the cue because of the subtlety.

## **Direct Stare**

A direct stare in feline parlance is threatening and confrontational. An offensively aggressive cat's pupils may be slits or dilated. Squinty eyelids protect the eyes from potential injury. In defensive aggression, pupils are dilated and brow furrowed. Avoid interacting with this cat. If you're not familiar with a particular cat, avoid risk of injury by not making direct eye contact.

## **Pain**

Cats wear a poker face when it comes to pain, but the eyes can be the tell for pain in the body or the eyes themselves. When a cat is experiencing body pain, pupils are dilated. A cat experiencing eye pain may have pupils that are dilated or constricted, depending on the injury or underlying disease. Squinting also indicates pain in the body or eye. Bloodshot eyes may also signal pain.

## **Slow Eye Blinks**

Aww, lovey-dovey kitty kisses. Slow eye blinks express love and trust. The eyes, lids partially closed, have a sleepy, dreamy appearance, as if cats are in a state of bliss. Should you be the lucky recipient of a slow blink, return the show of affection with a reciprocal slow blink to share the love.

Feline body language is often subtle, confusing, and at times, contradictory. Since our cats cannot verbally express their feelings to us we must become savvy to their body language, consider the context of the surroundings, and recognize each individual's quirks.



## *Angel Fund Virtual Fundraiser*

We have over a dozen baskets/packages to raffle off! Each \$1 donation gets you a ticket for a chance to win the item of your choice. The drawing will take place on 12/19/23 at noon. Winners will be called/emailed. Use coupon code THANKYOU to save 10% on orders \$30 and over. All proceeds benefit our own Angel Fund.

No tickets will be sold in-clinic.

*[Click Here to Enter Fundraiser](#)*