



Claw scratching is a normal feline behaviour. However, the occurrence of this behaviour indoors can be very unpleasant for the owner as it can cause expensive damage. Scratching indoors may indicate that the cat does not feel completely secure in its surroundings. In order to stop this destructive behaviour the owner must first understand why their cat is scratching in the house.

What is scratching?

Cats scratch objects for two reasons; to maintain good condition of their claws and to leave a message in that location. When the claws are dragged down a surface, a smell, which is unique to the individual, is deposited on the surface. This scent and the visual signal of the scratch marks and discarded claw husks provide a strong message to other cats, as well as to the cat itself.

Why does my cat scratch indoors?

Noting where your cat is scratching may give clues as to the reason for the scratching behaviour.

Many cats have limited or no access to outdoors and therefore have to maintain good claw condition inside the house. For this function, a cat will find one or two suitable scratching sites and use only them. Cats prefer to scratch on tall, sturdy objects that have a vertical weave; unfortunately in many cases the back of the sofa fits the bill far better than typical commercial scratching posts do!

Cats that particularly enjoy their owners' attention or those who are under-stimulated in the home might also learn that whenever they scratch the furniture or wallpaper their owners interact with them, but when they use their scratching post they are ignored. Consequently, they continue to scratch on inappropriate surfaces as a way of getting attention.

However, if the scratched areas are widespread throughout the home, and in areas of conflict, like doorways and windows, it is more likely that the cat is scratching for communicative reasons as a result of feeling insecure in these areas. The most common reason for this type of scratching is the presence of another cat; however, other environmental changes can also lead to this behaviour.

How can I stop my cat scratching indoors?

If your cat is scratching furniture or wallpaper to maintain its claws, you should cover the scratched surface with thick plastic sheeting to prevent the cat from scratching there. Then place an appropriate scratching post directly next to the scratched area. Ideal scratching posts have a heavy base to provide enough resistance when scratching, are tall enough to allow the cat to fully stretch out while scratching, and have a vertical weave to allow the cat to drag its claws downwards without snagging. You can encourage their cat to use this new post by placing tasty food rewards on it and praising your cat whenever it uses the post. Once the cat is consistently using the new post the owner can gradually move it to a more convenient location and remove the plastic sheeting from the protected surface.

If your cat is scratching furniture as a marking behaviour then you must first identify what is worrying your cat in this part of its territory and remedy this. Simply preventing your cat from scratching is inadequate; because this behaviour is an expression of your cat's anxiety. You may be able to work out what is worrying your cat from the locations it is scratching in, eg if your cat is scratching internal doorways or other areas where household cats have to pass each other frequently then the 'scratching' cat might feel threatened by the others. However, if the cat is scratching external doorways and window frames then it is more likely to be worried by something outside, such as a neighbouring cat coming into the garden.

You must deal with your cat's anxieties in order for it to feel more secure in its surroundings and to permanently stop its motivation to scratch the furniture. In addition to reducing your cat's stress, you can also encourage scratching on an appropriate surface. Cover the scratched area with a protective material and place a more appropriate scratching surface next to it.

Should I punish my cat for scratching indoors?

Scratching is a natural behaviour that cats should be allowed to exhibit. Shouting, or otherwise reacting to a cat, when it scratches furniture can actually cause the cat to scratch more frequently as it becomes more anxious in its environment or because it learns that scratching is a successful attention seeking behaviour.



Further help

This advice will cure most cases of indoor scratching; however, in some cases the problem is too complex for owners to address without help. It may then be necessary to ask your vet for a referral to a clinical behaviourist.

Can my cat be injured by a flap?

The flap is so light that it is unlikely to hurt a cat's tail, back or paws even when they fly through at great speed! For exceptionally acrobatic cats think about getting a flexible, rather than solid flap.

If you want any other information on health issues concerning your cat please contact Unicorn Vets on 023 8034 3434 and we will be happy to advise you.