

How Stress Affects Your Cat

What causes cats to be stressed?

There are some obvious and not so obvious reasons for your cat to feel ill at ease. Some cats are more naturally prone to stress. A cat's past experiences may also lead to them being stressed; they may have significant issues due to past traumas. The more in tune you are with your cat and their personality, the more aware you will be if they are stressed or anxious.

Major events in your cat's life that can lead to stress include:

- * Separation from family
- * Loss or addition of family member or cat
- * A health problem or pain
- * Moving to a new home

Other causes may be less evident but are just as influential and include:

- * Changes to daily routine
- * Loud noises
- * Fear
- * Inadequate nutrition
- * Boredom
- * **Lack of exercise / play**

Signs your cat is stressed:

Depending on your cat's temperament and personality, they will show signs of anxiety or stress in their own way. Changes in your cat's personality or behavior may indicate they are suffering from stress. These symptoms may include:

- * Changes in appetite – eating less or more
- * Loss or gain of weight
- * Excessive vocalizing
- * Changes in litter box usage – going outside of the box
- * Box sitting – a cat sitting in their litter box
- * Excessive grooming
- * Restlessness
- * Noticeable health issues
- * Excessive salivation or panting
- * Frequent vomiting
- * Destructive behaviors – such as scratching the carpet or furniture
- * Aggression
- * Trembling
- * Lethargy
- * Depression

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“I thought it was just another hairball but the veterinarian said it was stress.”

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Effects of stress on your cat:

If you have ever been stressed or anxious, then you know how uncomfortable and unhappy it makes you. The same is true for your cat.

If your cat becomes stressed or anxious, and you do nothing about it, your cat can become severely depressed, develop behavior problems and develop health issues due to a compromised immune system.

Ways to prevent and treat cat stress:

Depending on the source of the stress, there are several things you can do to try to minimize stress and anxiety in your cat's life. Whenever possible, remove the source of the tension or help your cat overcome their reaction to the cause.

Physical Methods:

- * Give your cat new toys and cat games to play with
- * Play laser with your cat
- * Grow or buy some catnip or catnip toys
- * Grow or buy cat grass
- * Add a new scratching post or cat tree to your home

Emotional Support:

- * Spend quality time with your cat
- * Have brushing and petting sessions with your cat
- * Make sure your cat has a 'safe' spot to take a time out

Always make sure your cat is getting nutritious cat food, fresh water, and a safe and secure environment.

If you have any doubt, you should always bring your cat to a vet to rule out any possible medical causes of stress. And in some cases, the cat may need over the counter or prescription anti-anxiety medications or the assistance of a veterinary behaviorist.

Treating anxiety in your cat may take some time, but if you are willing to work with your cat, you can help your cat find relief.

Corinne Mitchell is a cat socializer and an animal ambassador for Best Friends Animal Sanctuary. She lives with her husband and three rescue cats with the additional of an occasional foster in Coronado, CA. She has devoted countless hours to helping with the cats from The Great Kitty Rescue and is using what she learned to teach cat socialization, to help orphaned cats everywhere find homes and to establish a network for cat care givers.

