



# Cat Health

## Your cat's behaviour

Your cat's environment plays a big role in contributing to stress and anxiety, especially when it is unpredictable. Multi-pet households, limited access to essential resources (e.g. food, water, resting places and litter trays), noisy children, intrusive odours, renovations, family disruptions, and moving to a new house can all be sources of environmental stress (See [Environment](#))<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ellis, SLH, Rodan, I, Carney, HC, et al., 2013, AAFP and ISFM Feline Environmental Needs Guidelines, Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery, Vol 15(3), DOI: 10.1177/1098612X13477537, Accessed: 07 February 2022

<sup>2</sup>Herron, ME, Horowitz, DF, & Siracusa, C, 2020, Decoding Your Cat: The ultimate experts explain common cat behaviors and reveal how to prevent or change unwanted ones, 1st Edition, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt: New York



## Your cat's mental health

Failing to address situations that negatively impact your cat's mental health may lead to behaviour problems. This can compromise your cat's quality of life and put a strain on the cat-owner bond. For example, a scared or anxious cat may behave aggressively, scratch or bite (fight) if they are unable to escape and hide from a stressful situation (flight). Studies have shown that up to 38% of cats sent to UK shelters were relinquished for behaviour problems, with aggression between cats the most common reason given. It is important, therefore, that these issues are prevented where possible.<sup>34</sup>



<sup>3</sup>Cornell Feline Health Center, 2018, Feline Behavior Problems: Aggression, Available at: <https://www.vet.cornell.edu/departments-centers-and-institutes/cornell-feline-health-center/health-information/feline-health-topics/feline-behavior-problems-aggression>, Accessed 11 January 2022

<sup>4</sup>Casey, RA, Vandenbussche, Bradshaw, JWS, & Roberts, MA, 2009, 3 Reasons for Relinquishment and Return of Domestic Cats (*Felis Silvestris Catus*) to Rescue Shelters in the UK, Vol 22(4), pp: 347-358



## Signs to look out for

If prevention is not possible and your cat is exhibiting signs of a behaviour problem, it is important that you seek professional advice from a veterinarian or a qualified pet behaviourist as soon as possible. When choosing a behaviourist, look for practitioners who are registered members of professional associations that meet current scientific and evidence-based behaviour and training standards, for example:

[International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants](#)

[Fellowship of Animal Behaviour Clinicians \(UK\)](#)

[Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors \(International\)](#)

[Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists \(America\)](#)

[American College of Veterinary Behaviorists](#)







## The impact of stress

Stress also activates a physical response, triggering the release of substances such as steroid hormones, adrenaline, neurotransmitters, and biological regulators that can lead to inflammation and pain. This process has been associated with the development of certain diseases in cats, such as Feline Idiopathic Cystitis (FIC). FIC is the most common type of lower urinary tract disease in cats and leads to painful inflammation of the bladder and urethra<sup>5</sup>.

A diagnosis of FIC must be made by a veterinarian by ruling out other causes of urinary issues such as a urinary tract infection (UTI) or bladder stones.

<sup>5</sup>Herron, ME, Horowitz, DF, & Siracusa, C, 2020, Decoding Your Cat: The ultimate experts explain common cat behaviors and reveal how to prevent or change unwanted ones, 1st Edition, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt: New York



## Clinical signs of Feline Idiopathic Cystitis (FIC) may include:<sup>6</sup>

- Straining to urinate
- Urinating frequently but passing only small amounts
- Prolonged attempts to urinate
- Vocalising when urinating
- Excessive licking of the genital area
- Blood in the urine
- Urinating outside the litter tray



<sup>6</sup>AVMA, Feline lower urinary tract disease, Available at: <https://www.avma.org/resources/pet-owners/petcare/feline-lower-urinary-tract-disease>, Accessed 11 January 2022





## Other ways to prevent FIC

Like many stress-related conditions, FIC requires a multi-modal or holistic approach to treatment. Identifying and resolving potential stressors in your cat's environment, providing pain relief, improving litter box management, increasing water intake and a change in diet (see [Nutrition](#)) are typically used in combination to treat FIC and help prevent its recurrence.<sup>7,8</sup>

There are also cat litters available, such as [Pretty Litter](#), that change colour in response to a pH change or the presence of blood so that you may be alerted to a problem even before your cat shows any physical signs.

If you think your cat has FIC, it's important to consult your vet and not try to treat the condition alone. Many conditions share similar symptoms to FIC and may need managing in a different way.

<sup>7</sup>Herron, ME, Horowitz, DF, & Siracusa, C, 2020, Decoding Your Cat: The ultimate experts explain common cat behaviors and reveal how to prevent or change unwanted ones, 1st Edition, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt: New York

<sup>8</sup>AVMA, Feline lower urinary tract disease, Available at: <https://www.avma.org/resources/pet-owners/petcare/feline-lower-urinary-tract-disease>, Accessed 11 January 2022



## Other ways stress may affect your cat

Stress may also exacerbate underlying health issues, for instance, cat flu, skin conditions, or gastrointestinal problems such as IBD (Irritable Bowel Disease), vomiting or diarrhoea.<sup>9</sup> Even changes to your cat's environment that you might consider small, such as new furniture, a change in work schedule or the arrival of visitors could be enough to induce disease in some cats.<sup>10</sup>

This is why it's important to consult a veterinarian as soon as possible if you have any concerns about how stress may be affecting your cat.



Learn more about health and emotional wellbeing for your pets at [shine.waltham.com](https://www.shine.waltham.com)



<sup>9</sup> Battersea UK, Stressed Cat, Available at: <https://www.battersea.org.uk/pet-advice/cat-care-advice/reducing-your-cats-stress>, Accessed 11 January 2022

<sup>10</sup> Ellis, SLH, Rodan, I, Carney, HC, et al., 2013, AAEP and ISFM Feline Environmental Needs Guidelines, Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery, Vol 15(3), DOI: 10.1177/1098612X13477537, Accessed: 07 February 2022