

Feline Stress & Anxiety

EXPLANATIONS

1. What kind of things cause stress and anxiety in a cat and why?

Before we graciously took cats into our homes, they lived very different lives. They roamed free and had lots of space available to them. They controlled their resources; where they went to eliminate, eat and rest. This allowed them to avoid interactions with other cats, dogs and people if they chose to do so. It was also easier to escape threatening and stressful situations.

Now our cats live in houses and apartments that may limit their ability to roam. They have little or no control over their resources. Their access to the outdoors is restricted or not allowed. They now share their living space with other cats, dogs, children, etc. While these changes have protected cats and improved their health and welfare, they also can cause stress and anxiety.

2. What are the behavioral signs of stress and anxiety?

- When they are stressed, cats may mark their territory with urine (urine spraying)
- Stressed cats may also mark with their claws
- Cats that are stressed may also fight with other cats in their environment
- Lack of grooming or over-grooming (excessive licking of the body) may be a symptom of stress
- Persistent hiding or vomiting

3. What are the medical signs of stress and anxiety?

- Cystitis
- Alopecia
- Anorexia
- Obesity or poor body condition and thinness

4. What can be done to help diminish stress and anxiety in a cat?

- Add Feliway diffusers to diminish tension and the need to mark with urine and claws
- Create an environment that utilizes the space in a feline friendly way
 - Have one food bowl per cat in different locations
 - Create places for cats to arrange themselves vertically with climbing towers and shelves
 - Have litter boxes throughout the environment and at least one per cat
- Create an environment that stimulates the cat mentally
 - Offer a variety of toys that are rotated every few days
 - Create "treasure hunts" or foraging that allows the cat to utilize their inner predator
- Create safe zones so cats that do not get along can avoid each other if they wish
- Make sure to spend time interacting with your cat through play, petting and just being nearby

If these steps do not help your pet with their stress or anxiety, please consult your veterinarian for more help or referral to a board certified Veterinary Behaviorist.

