

Your Cat Knows All Your Secrets, and He's Telling

Bolton Veterinary Hospital

The following article describes a fictionalized version of an actual appointment, with names and details changed to protect privacy. Your cat may tell your secrets, but they're safe with us.

Mr. Samuelson couldn't understand why his cats had suddenly stopped getting along with each other. "They're brothers!" he exclaimed, "They've been together all their lives, seven years! And just these last few weeks, they've been hissing at each other and fighting. And even worse than that, one of them peed in the foyer." "Well, has anything changed in your household recently?" the vet inquired.

"Nothing." Mr. Samuelson replied. "I just have these two cats, no other animals have even visited. They eat the same food and treats, they have the same litter, they have tons of toys but none of them are really new... They're fighting over things they never fought over before."

The vet pressed on, "Has anything changed in your life or routine, though?"

"Sure." Mr. Samuelson replied. "I got a new job this month. But what does that matter to the cats, they don't go to work with me."

"Where is your new job?" the vet asked.

"It's a dairy farm." he replied.

"And are there cats living in the barn?"

A look of realization crossed Mr. Samuelson's face. "They smell the barn cats on my coat and shoes, is that it? And they're mad because of that?"



It makes sense, after all, that a cat - particularly an indoor cat - would take note of changes in their environment and the routine of their family. Imagine if you spent nearly your whole life living within four walls, with each day very similar to the one before, and then something drastically changed: A guest visits, carrying the scent of their own three cats (invaders!!). Your owners move you to a new house (kidnapping!!). The kitchen is renovated and a dishwasher is newly installed (after two weeks of calamity, there is now a monstrosity that makes loud splashing noises every night!!). You'd hardly spend a moment thinking about anything else.

Bolton Vet sees many appointments for cat behavior concerns, and owners are often taken by surprise when the doctor asks about what's different in the household - this is an appointment for the cat, what does it matter if I got a new job and my schedule is different, or there has been noisy road construction going on in front of the house, or I broke up with my boyfriend and he moved out of the apartment?

Exposure to stress like this can cause more than just behavioral issues for cats, it can cause illness as well. The most common scenario is that stress can cause cats to urinate outside of the litter box. Sometimes there is a direct cause, for example, the newly adopted puppy pounces on the cat when she exits the litter box, and so she's learned to hide under the bed all day long

and seek out more a private bathroom venue. But the cause is often indirect. Different species manifest stress in different ways; a dog may pace the house, claw at the door, and chew the leg of a table, while a seriously stressed-out person may sleep poorly, gain weight, and lose hair. Cats, interestingly, manifest stress in their urinary tract. A cat who holds their urine for too long because of a stressful situation will be predisposed to urinary tract infection, and sometimes inflammation of the bladder wall (exclusive of infection!) will result from anxiety, causing a cat to urinate in inappropriate places due to discomfort.

Just as there are many potential sources of stress for cats, we have many ways of addressing it. Sometimes the causative factor can be changed, and sometimes it cannot. In either case, there are many measures we can take to reduce stress for cats and treat any resulting illness, keeping them healthy and happy (and this will be the topic of our next blog post).

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