



PARKSIDE

CLIENT INFORMATION HANDOUT

SPRAYING CATS

Spraying is a normal act of chemical communication and territorial marking carried out by many species. The smell of the spray carries information regarding sex, sexual condition, rank and possibly emotional state and is often deposited regularly at specific marking sites. Cat's invariably top up their own marks and attempt to cover those of others and cats of either sex will spray to attract mates.

Although the majority of cats spray at some time of their lives, fortunately only a small minority do so in the home. A healthy solitary cat living in a stable environment usually has no need to spray in the house where it is secure from threat, preferring to concentrate such social and territorial activities outside. The cat that sprays indoors is not a dirty cat but one requiring careful analysis for cause and treatment.

DIAGNOSIS

Spraying should be distinguished from normal elimination (toileting) for purposes of treatment. When spraying, a cat holds its rump high with tail erect and quivering at the tip. Alternating stepping movements of the hind feet may also be observed as the spray is sent backwards usually onto a vertical surface. The volume of spray is typically about 1ml directed short jets. This contrasts with urination where up to 20ml of urine are deposited from a squatting position into a hole or prepared toilet, and then covered up afterwards.

CAUSE

Most problems of spraying indoors occur due to the presence of rivals or social upheaval. Owners may unwittingly disturb the domestic status quo by decorating or acquiring new furniture, or more usually by taking in a new cat. Alternatively outdoor rivals may enter the home via a cat flap and challenge the resident cat. Loss of human or feline companions and other changes in the family can also turn a normal pet into a sprayer and feeding may stimulate spraying to ward off rivals from stealing any surplus 'kill'.

Physical blockages of the urogenital tracts by uroliths (stones) are symptoms of FUS (feline urolithiasis syndrome) and may cause a cat to adopt a spraying posture when straining to urinate. This is a painful and dangerous condition, if suspected consult your vet immediately.

TREATMENT

Surgery/Medication:

A: MALES – Castration of the entire males causes spraying to diminish or cease entirely. Also, after castration, male urine smells much less pungent.

B: FEMALES – Unless spraying only occurs when a queen is in season, neutering will not usually prevent the behaviour.

C: FELIWAY - This is our first line of treatment. This is a feline pheromone which has been shown to reduce marking levels. This is a safe and effective method of treatment available as a diffuser or spray and works by increasing the cat's sense of wellbeing and reduces their urge to mark territory.

Sedative or other psycho-active drugs may also help in the short term while environmental and behavioural changes are introduced. We can talk about these options.

Access:

Entry or the possibility of entry by outsiders through a cat flap is a major influence on the sprayer. If a cat flap is desired use a model which allows only your cat to enter by carrying a selective magnetic or electronic key on its collar. Better still encourage improved recognition of indoor security compared with outdoor 'jungle' by allowing access via the door. Most cats learn to 'ask' to go out or come in.

Cleanliness:

All sprayed areas should be thoroughly cleaned using special products such as Total Care or Odour Eliminator – ask at reception. DO NOT USE cleaning agents containing ammonia as this is also found in spray and the cat may simply view your efforts as those of another over marking his scent. Proprietary repellents usually only mask the smell to the human nose, not to the cat's. Avoid leaving access to favourite targets such as black plastic waste bags or to objects brought in from outdoors e.g. shoes. Where many rooms are affected, restrict access while each room is thoroughly cleaned in turn, allowing gradual reintroduction only under close supervision.

Punishment:

Avoid any direct physical punishment for which the cat may 'blame' the owner. This will promote feelings of insecurity and increase the need to spray. Punishment after the event e.g. rubbing the nose in it is pointless but the cat caught in the act should receive an unpleasant stimulus e.g. jet of water.

Security:

Increasing a spraying cat's confidence and security may help reduce its need to spray. Feed sensitive individuals away from other cats and provide a safe bed and bolt holes to escape from other pets, children etc.

Rehoming:

It can be particularly difficult for owners to harmonise an antagonistic relationship between cats and thereby solve the spraying problem. This is particularly relevant with the more assertive pedigree cats which can be less tolerant of flatmates than 'moggies'. Cats may appear to be friendly in open spaces or even curl up asleep together but the stress of sharing a lair is often manifested by spraying. Rehoming the key offender(s) to become an only house cat may be the best and kindest solution.

If the above treatments do not solve the problem a more detailed analysis will be required.

Extracted from Dr. R.A. Mugford November 1986

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