

Feline Anxiety

Cats, like people, can develop anxiety. Just like in people, some cats anxiety can be managed by reducing stressors and making changes to their environment, while others may need medication. To a pet owner, it can be very upsetting to watch their beloved pet struggle with anxiety.

Signs that your cat has anxiety

- ❖ Hiding all of the time. It's not unusual for cats to enjoy their "alone time", and some cats are less social than others. However, if you feel like you barely have a cat because you see him/her so little, it could be that he/she is anxious
- ❖ Unprovoked aggression. If your cat becomes aggressive with you for seemingly no reason, it could be anxiety. However, you need to rule out redirected aggression (aggression caused by a specific factor, such as a neighbourhood cat sitting in your yard, then taken out on the owner because the cat can't get to the source of the frustration) or simple boredom
- ❖ Excessive vocalization. Cats only meow to communicate with humans, so if you feel your cat meows excessively, or if there is a desperate tone to their meow, this could be their way of trying to communicate that something doesn't feel right for them.
- ❖ Overgrooming. Again, first rule out boredom, or medical causes such as allergies or parasites.
- ❖ Litterbox avoidance. It is VERY important to rule out medical causes, such as pain caused by UTI, constipation, or being declawed. If all is well physically, consider anxiety
- ❖ Changes to eating habits. If your cat begins to eat constantly, or stops eating, a trip to the vet is in order to be sure there isn't a medical explanation. If not, this could be anxiety.
- ❖ Pacing/restlessness. The average cat sleeps around 16 hours a day, so if your kitty is doing more roaming and pacing than sleeping, this could be a sign that they're anxious.
- ❖ Lethargy. This too could be caused by a myriad of health conditions, but if your vet gives kitty a clean bill of health, anxiety could be to blame.

How to ease your cat's anxiety

- ❖ Maintain a consistent environment. Don't frequently change furniture position, keep their litter boxes and food dishes in the same place, and limit having many people in your home if your cat is prone to anxiety.
- ❖ Interact and play with your cat regularly.
- ❖ Schedule, schedule, schedule. Cats crave routine and consistency – schedule their feedings and your play sessions, and keep your own schedule as consistent as possible.
- ❖ Make sure your cat has his/her own "safe" space. A quiet place for them to retreat to if you have company, or things are louder than usual (eg. there's construction outside).
- ❖ Use feline pheromone sprays/diffusers
- ❖ If all else fails, your veterinarian may suggest medication

Resources: <https://www.thesprucepets.com/reducing-anxiety-in-cats-554064>

<https://www.purina.co.uk/cats/behaviour-and-training/understanding-cat-behaviour/cat-anxiety>