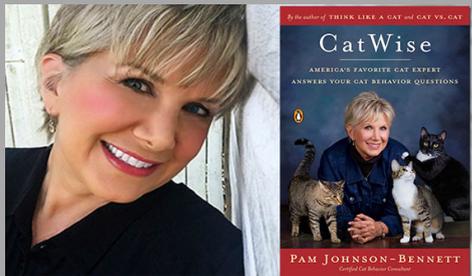


WHY DOES MY CAT SCRATCH THE FURNITURE?

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Pam Johnson-Bennett is a certified cat behavior consultant and best-selling author of 8 books on cat behavior including *THINK LIKE A CAT* and *CATWISE*. She starred in the Animal Planet series

PSYCHO KITTY

SCRATCHING IS NORMAL

You might be under the misconception that scratching is merely your cat's attempt to sharpen his claws to razor-sharp perfection or that the behavior is based on a desire to destroy his surroundings. If you view the cat's motivation for scratching as just an act of destruction, you run the risk of damaging the relationship you have with your cat.

DON'T DECLAW

Having claws is a vital part of a cat's physical and emotional health. Declawing is the equivalent of amputation. Pain can last long after the healing process and may even continue for the rest of the cat's life. The *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery* published research indicating declawing increases the risk of long-term or persistent pain, which can result in behaviors such as litter box avoidance, aggression/biting and over-grooming.

SCRATCHING HELPS WITH CLAW HEALTH

When your cat scratches on an object, it removes the outer dead sheath of the nail and exposes the healthy new growth underneath. Scratching is how the cat keeps the claws healthy.

SCRATCHING IS ALSO FOR MARKING

The marks left on an object when the cat rakes his claws vertically create a visual sign for others who pass by. In an outdoor setting, these visual markers are important because they show approaching cats that they're entering an area where another cat has been or currently resides. This advance warning system can reduce the number of physical confrontations since the visual mark can be seen at a distance. Scratching also creates an olfactory mark as the cat presses his paws onto an object. There are scent glands in the paw pads that release pheromones as the cat scratches. Any approaching cat who comes close enough to the scratched object gets information about the cat who did the scratching.

STRETCHING AND STRESS-RELIEF

Scratching is a very effective way for the cat to stretch his back and shoulder muscles.

Scratching is also used as an emotional release or displacement behavior. When your cat is anxious, happy, excited or frustrated, he can release some of that built-up emotion by scratching. Think of the times you've seen your cat scratching on an object as you prepare his dinner or when you've come home from work. You may even have noticed him scratching after an encounter with a companion cat. This ability to have an emotional release through scratching is healthy.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT POST

Provide a scratching post that has cat appeal. The scratching post should meet these qualifications:

- ✓ Appealing texture
- ✓ Tall
- ✓ Sturdy

The most appealing texture for most cats is sisal. The rough texture makes it easy dig their claws in and get an effective scratch. Carpet-covered posts are too soft and many cats end up getting their claws caught in the carpet loops.

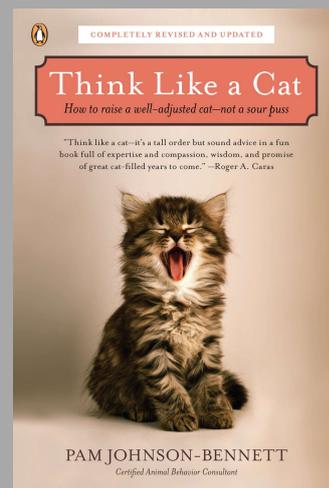
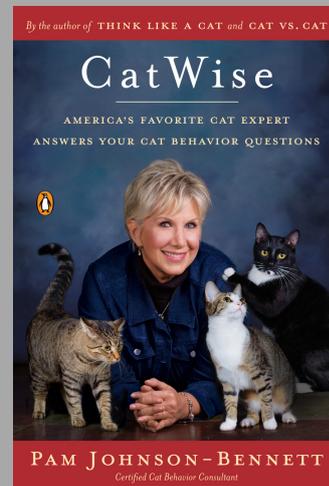
The height of the scratching post should enable the cat to get a full stretch. Make sure the tall post is also very stable. A tall post needs a wide base in order to prevent it from toppling when your cat leans his full weight against it.

For cats who like to scratch horizontally, there are inexpensive corrugated cardboard scratching pads available at your local pet product store.

SCRATCHING POST LOCATION

When a cat needs to scratch he'll look for the closest object that meets his needs. Keep the post where where your cat likes to spend time or where he typically tends to scratch. If he currently scratches the sofa, place a sheet over the piece of furniture or cover the scratched area with Sticky Paws (a double-sided tape meant for this purpose that won't harm furniture) and place the scratching post right there. The key is to provide your cat with a better option than the furniture.

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