

Appendix 18

Recognizing Stress

It is not easy to spot if a cat is stressed because what is stressful to one cat may not be in the least bit stressful to another, and every cat will react differently. Also, because demonstrating any weakness could make them vulnerable to attack from potential predators, or even other cats, they can be very good at hiding their feelings, especially when they feel threatened.

However, any of the following signs could indicate that a cat maybe suffering from stress.

Physiological Signs of Stress

These signs are more likely to be seen as a result of acute stress:

- Panting.
- Salivation.
- Dilated pupils.
- Sweaty paws.
- Loss of bladder control.
- Diarrhoea.
- Constipation.
- Loss of appetite.

Behavioural Signs of Stress

- Increased vigilance.
- Appearing tense, only able to relax for short periods.
- Lowered head and body posture, especially when the cat is fearful. The head may be positioned lower than the body.
- Ears flattened sideways.
- Tail held close to body.
- Poor appetite.
- A decrease in grooming, resulting in a matted, uncared for coat, or ‘excessive grooming’ causing regular regurgitation of hair balls, and if excessive, hair thinning and bald patches.
- Withdrawing – not wanting to interact, play or be fussed.
- Continually or frequently attempting to hide or escape.
- Sham sleeping. If a cat can’t escape the thing that is making him feel stressed, he will often pretend to sleep and hope that whatever or whoever it is will just go away.
- Indoor urine marking (spraying) is a common sign of stress in neutered house cats.

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