

BEWARE OF THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

Is your cat guilty of one of these feline deadly sins? Emily Fowler looks at what might be causing these 'sinful' behaviours and what you can do to resolve them

It is important to recognise your cat's normal behaviour so that any 'sinful' deviations will be noticed and can quickly be acted upon if necessary.

Lust:

For the majority of us, our pet cats are blissfully unaware of the temptations of the opposite sex, because they're spayed (female cats) or neutered (male cats). Sadly, there are still cat owners who don't get their pet cats spayed or neutered, because they aren't fully aware of the risks of not neutering. There are so many valid reasons to get your pet cat neutered and, with the amount of information available about the problems not neutering causes, there's really no excuse.

Overpopulation - Hundreds of thousands of unwanted cats and kittens are born in the UK every year, and with cat rescues and charities in the UK often full to overflowing, there are sadly a large

number of these kittens destined for a life on the streets. Just one female cat can have up to three litters every year, and be responsible for 20,000 descendants in only five years, with a large proportion of those descendants never to find a forever home.

Disease, illness and death - Giving birth to just one litter puts stress on a female cat's body and puts her at risk of complications. And there's the risk of diseases like FIV (Feline Immunodeficiency Virus) and FeLV (Feline Leukaemia Virus) being transmitted through mating.

FIV is also commonly transmitted during fighting, which is more likely to happen between territorial unneutered males. These unneutered males will travel far and wide looking for females to mate with and they don't care how many busy roads they have to cross in the process. As a result, many get killed on the road every year.

Neutering both male and female cats also reduces or removes the risk of a

number of aggressive feline cancers such as mammary cancer, testicular cancer and ovarian cancer.

Behaviour - Some people think they're being 'kind' to their pet cats by not getting them spayed or neutered but they probably regret that decision once the sexual behaviours start to kick in! An unneutered male is more likely to spray in your home, (and it'll smell really bad), as well as wandering miles and miles from home and fighting other cats.

Female cats are highly fertile if they haven't been spayed and once they reach sexually maturity, which can be as early as four months old, they can go into oestrus (or heat) every few weeks. The signs that your cat is in heat include her rolling around on the floor, marking, rubbing against furniture and 'calling' – a very specific type of noise that only female cats in heat make, and that's not easily forgotten once heard!

Gluttony:

It's a common misconception that cats will stop eating when they're full. If that were the case, we wouldn't see any overweight or obese cats. Unfortunately, feline obesity is a growing problem (no pun intended) and it's not always easy to deal with.

Some cats seem to be hungry all the time and like me, you may have one of those cats that goes crazy every time you go into the kitchen to make a cup of tea (as someone who works from home, that's often!). It can be so tempting to feed a little treat or two but just the same as with humans, feline obesity can cause serious health problems and a shortened life expectancy. It's very important to be aware of your cat's optimum weight and how to avoid obesity.

It can be difficult to know exactly what





the ideal weight is for your cat and it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that all cats should be 'cute and cuddly'. Of course all cats are cute but they can be cuddly without being overweight. The best way to assess your cat's body condition is to run your hands down the side of its body (you should be able to feel the ribs), look from above (you should be able to see a well-defined waist) and make sure that there isn't a pendulous belly underneath.

If you think that your cat is overweight, it's so important that you don't go down the 'crash diet' route, because losing too much weight in too short a time can cause hepatic lipidosis – a liver disease which can be fatal. The best way to start your cat's weight loss journey is with a trip to the vet, who can help to devise a feeding plan and exercise regime. It may take a while before your cat is at a perfect weight but it's worth it to make sure your beloved pet is with you for as long as possible.

Greed:

Have you got a pilfering puss? One that steals your socks, pens or food as soon as your back's turned? You might think that it's greed making your cat steal things but it's actually more likely to be one of these reasons.

Attention Seeking - It's easy for us to 'teach' our cat things, without even realising we're doing it. When you give your cat a telling off for stealing your pen when you were trying to use it, your cat learns that stealing equals attention.

If you ignore any future kleptomaniac behaviour, while at the same time making sure your cat has plenty of play time and environmental enrichment, you might just find that the attention seeking stealing

stops.

Predatory behaviour - This is more likely to be the reason your cat may steal food – whether that's from your plate or the kitchen counter. Even though you feed your cat regularly, some of that natural predatory behaviour is always going to be there, so 'hunting' for a chicken wing from your plate or a piece of ham from your sandwich can be a way to fulfil that.

Try making feeding time slightly more interesting for your cat by using a puzzle feeder or even consider feeding little and often, the way a cat would eat in the wild, instead of two or three big meals.

Boredom - The most common reason for cats who steal is simply boredom, and

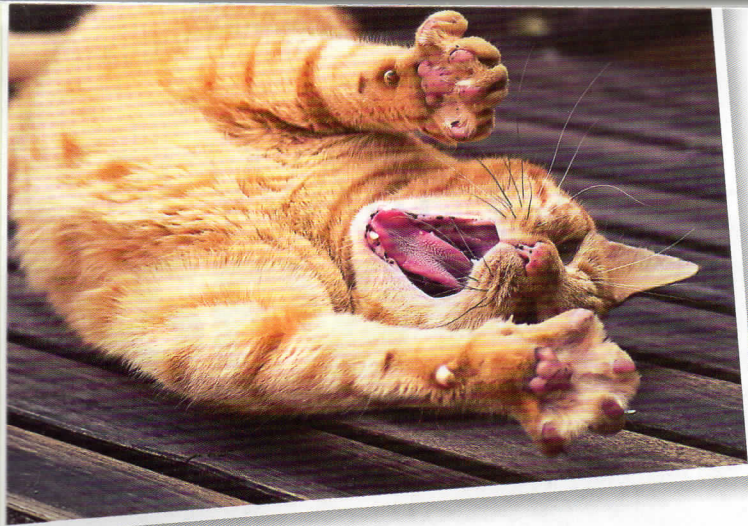
luckily that's easily solved! Providing lots of stimulation throughout the day should mean that your cat won't need to entertain itself by stealing your socks and hiding them behind the sofa.

Sloth:

It's a hard life being a cat; all that grooming, eating and chasing flying insects, so it's no wonder that they spend so much time kicking back and relaxing – roughly 42% of their day sleeping and 30% of their day resting.

While sleeping a lot is a natural feline behaviour, an increase in the time your cat spends sleeping might be cause for concern. We're naturally in the best posi-





feline aggression to deal with.

A new cat introduced into your home will bring new, strange scents into your cat's territory, so gradually mixing in the new cat's scent by swapping bedding, toys and rooms will help the integration. Be prepared for the process to take some time; gradual introductions are usually the key to successfully diffusing territorial aggression when you're introducing new cats.

Re-directed aggression - Re-directed aggression is when your cat is agitated by something out of reach, such as next door's dog outside the window, and ends up directing the aggression to what's in reach; that probably means you!

To avoid being the victim of re-directed aggression, make sure you know the signs that indicate your cat is worked up and avoid getting too close.

Petting aggression - I'm sure we've all experienced this one; one stroke of the tummy, two strokes of the tummy, three... and teeth and claws in your hand! All cats have a petting threshold and they're usually all different.

The signs that you're about to go over your cat's petting threshold include a swishing tail and flattened ears, so if you want to avoid petting aggression, now is the time to step away from the cat!

Envy:

If your cat has been the focus of your attention up until now and a new baby or

even a new pet is due to join your household, it's important to prepare your cat for the new arrival to avoid any issues of kitty envy.

Kim Houston showed us how to best prepare your cat for the arrival of a new baby in the March issue of *Catworld Magazine* and similar steps can be taken if you're introducing a new pet. Creating a sanctuary for your cat and introducing the new pet's scent on cloths and blankets will start to prepare your cat for the newcomer. It's also important to try to keep the level of attention you give your cat the same as usual, because a change either way might upset your cat.

Pride:

Cats are very fastidious when it comes to grooming themselves and being that gorgeous, can we blame them for taking so much care over their appearance? However, sometimes that pride can turn into a physical and psychological issue, overgrooming (psychogenic alopecia).

Overgrooming can be caused by a number of reasons, including stress, boredom, skin conditions or even genes (some breeds, like Siamese, are naturally more prone to overgrooming). Whatever the cause, it'll leave your poor cat with bald patches and sore, red and inflamed skin. Once your vet has diagnosed the cause of the overgrooming, treatment will usually be in two parts - treating the physical symptoms as well as treating the cause. Medicine will probably be prescribed to treat any skin problems caused by your cat's overgrooming and you can then start working to reduce the cause of your cat's stress or boredom. 🐾

tion to know what's normal for our cats, so if you notice a dramatic increase in the amount of time your cat spends sleeping, it's worth a veterinary check-up to rule out any health issues. An increased need to sleep could be caused by illnesses like diabetes or respiratory tract infections but also boredom or stress.

Wrath:

Whether or not our cats actually feel human emotions like anger we'll probably never know but they can certainly display aggression. It's not always easy to understand what motivates a cat's aggressive behaviour, especially if the cat suddenly turns from a placid lap cat to a hissing ball of claws - the following are some of the most common types of feline aggression.

Pain-Induced aggression - This is the most obvious to understand if you witness your cat getting hurt, for example accidentally stepping on your cat's tail will probably result in an immediate burst of aggression. Even if you don't witness the cause of your cat's pain, it might be an illness or injury that you're not aware of, so it's important to rule out pain-induced aggression with a visit to your vet.

Play aggression - More common with cats who were taken away from their mother and littermates too early, a cat with play aggression won't have learned when to control the teeth and claws during play times.

If your cat gets over excited and aggressive during play, you need to teach them that your hands aren't prey. Fishing rod type toys and interactive toys your cat can play with on its own are great for this and, if you do end up on the receiving end of some play aggression, stop the session there and then calmly walk away. Your cat will soon learn that being aggressive ends the fun and will start playing more appropriately.

Territorial aggression - Territorial aggression is usually directed toward another cat, so it can be the hardest type of

