

Calm Cats: Crucial Pheromones

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



CAT OWNERS KNOW THAT FELINES HAVE AN AMAZING SENSE OF HEARING, BUT THEY MIGHT BE SURPRISED TO LEARN JUST HOW MUCH INFORMATION THEIR PETS GATHER ABOUT THE WORLD AROUND THEM USING THEIR SENSE OF SMELL. MUCH OF THIS INFORMATION COMES FROM OTHER CATS, IN THE FORM OF PHEROMONES – CHEMICAL COMPOUNDS THAT TRANSMIT INFORMATION FROM ONE ANIMAL TO ANOTHER VIA SCENT.

Pheromones were first studied in the 1950s, in moths and ants. Almost all species produce pheromones, including insects, animals, and humans. These microscopic compounds are produced by special scent glands in the body. Cats take in the odor of pheromones through a special sensory apparatus in the roof of the mouth called the vomeronasal organ. If you've ever noticed your cat pausing with his mouth partly open and his upper lip curled back as he inhales, you've seen him smelling pheromones.

Interestingly, pheromones send chemical signals that can influence behavior. For example, when female cats are in heat, they produce a pheromone that male cats - even those several miles away - are attracted to. Anyone whose sleep has been interrupted by tomcats yowling outside their window knows how persistent they can be.



Cats will also scent-mark various household surfaces, such as the edges of doors or walls, by rubbing the sides of their faces against them. This leaves a pheromone marker, along with a tiny bit of fat, which is why these areas sometimes develop a brownish appearance. These facial pheromones seem to produce feelings of contentment; therefore, cats rub the same spots over and over again.

Products such as [Comfort Zone® with Feliway®](#) are synthetic versions of these facial pheromones and can be very helpful for cats with stress-related behavior problems. Cats are creatures of habit, and any change in their environment can be stressful – moving, travel, a trip to the veterinarian, a new cat in the household, the loss of a human or another pet, or sometimes even a simple furniture rearrangement.

Cats often respond to stress with behaviors such as urine marking, overgrooming, not using the litter box, refusing to eat, or hiding. Using a product such as Comfort Zone® with Feliway® can be remarkably helpful in easing the cat through the stressful period. Feliway® is not sprayed on the cat, but on appropriate surfaces in the environment, such as the cat carrier before a trip to the veterinarian. Feliway® is also available in a [plug-in room diffuser](#) to use in larger areas. The diffuser is a good idea when bringing home a new kitten, or when a new cat is being introduced into a multi-cat household. For a large home, several diffusers will probably be best, placed in areas where cats spend the most time.

Pheromones go a long way in helping a cat feel content and comfortable in an ever-changing world. If your cat seems in need of a little calming, talk to your veterinarian, then take steps to enhance her environment with pheromones.

PHEROMONE FACTS

Both male and female cats secrete pheromones when they urinate. Other cats sniffing that spot gain information about the first cat's gender, location, and hierarchical status. A lower-status cat might leave the area rather than risk a confrontation with a higher-ranking cat.

Mother cats secrete pheromones from glands around their nipples, which help nursing kittens feel secure and content. These pheromones also help kittens identify their mother should they become separated.