

## Why do cats. . . ?

*Cats are mysterious creatures - it's part of their charm! Although we still have much to learn about them, we do know the answers to some often-asked questions.*

### *Why do cats purr?*

Purring is unique to the cat family. Tiny kittens purr when they suck from their mother - they can suck and purr at the same time. The mother cat may purr as she approaches the nest - it is a quiet signal between them that all is well. This behaviour persists into adulthood with other cats and, of course, with us - a sign of wellbeing and one we love to hear.

### *Why do cats groom?*

Cats are very meticulous about their coats and spend a third of their waking time grooming. The tongue is covered in tiny barbs which help to part and dematt the hair.

Grooming has several functions:

- Keeping the coat clean and free of strong smells
- Keeping the coat laid flat and waterproof
- Keeping the touch sensitive hairs untangled
- Cooling the cat by evaporation of saliva in hot weather
- Exchanging scents with other members of the group
- Helping to relax and relieve tension



### *Why do cats' eyes glow green in some photos?*

Cats have fantastic eyesight in low light conditions. This is because they have a special layer of cells behind the retina which reflect the light back and give them a second chance to see the image - they are six times better at seeing at dawn or dusk than we are. This layer of cells bounces back the light from a camera flash making the eyes look fluorescent green. Interestingly, Siamese cats have a different type of cells at the back of their eyes and this will glow red in flash photos.

### *Why do cats knead when they sit on our laps?*

This is another behaviour which has persisted from very early in the cat's life. Kittens, when sucking, knead their mother to stimulate the flow of milk. They often dribble when they do this on our laps - the body still associates it with getting a meal!

### *Why do cats hunt even though we feed them?*

The sensation of hunger and the urge to hunt are controlled by different parts of the cat's brain - a full stomach does not over-ride the impulse to hunt which is motivated by movement

or sound. Cats cannot survive without meat, therefore hunting has to be successful and the body must be primed to hunt at any opportunity.

### *Why do cats need to eat meat?*

Perhaps because they have been so successful as hunters and at obtaining meat, cats (unlike dogs) lack certain chemicals which would allow them to convert, build or breakdown some nutrients to make others needed by the body. Certain substances are therefore absolutely vital in the diet and some of these are only available in meat. A cat cannot be a vegetarian.

### *Why do cats rub themselves around us?*

As cats rub around our legs they are actually smearing us with scent from glands on the face and body. This scent mixes with our own and gives everyone a familiar smell which is reassuring to cats who are very sensitive to the scents around them.

### *Why do Siamese cats have a darker face, paws and tails?*

These darker 'points' at the extremes of the body are cooler than the rest of the body and the hair grows through darker. If an area is shaved for an operation this too will grow back darker for the same reason, but will revert to normal colour as hairs are naturally replaced.

### *Why do cats get us up early (if they can)?*

Cats are what is called crepuscular hunters - they are most active at dawn and dusk when prey such as small mammals will be active and when their excellent eyesight can give them a great advantage. If they can train you to wake up when they feel energetic they will!

### *Why do cats not like sweet things to eat?*

A cat's natural diet would be almost entirely composed of meat (with the odd chew at grass or herbs). It would have no need for taste receptors which would recognise 'sweet' as we know it. There may be aromas from different proteins or fats in meat which give cats the same sort of pleasure that we associate with the sensation of 'sweet' - after all, they will be meat connoisseurs. Of course there is always the odd cat which will like something strange!

## Do you know . . .

### How do you calculate a cat's age?

The often recounted way of comparing a cat's or dog's age with that of a person is to multiply by seven. However, this does not equate very well with the life stages and growth rate of the cat. Here's a way which makes more sense.

The first year of a cat's life can be taken as equivalent to 15 human years. By the time it is 2, a cat can be considered to be the equivalent of a 24 year old person. Thereafter each year can be taken as four human years. eg, a 10 year old would be  $24 + (8 \times 4) = 56$ .

If the cat is lucky enough to live past 16, the years after this can probably be taken to be the equivalent of three human years.

Thus a cat will be middle-aged by the time it is about 8 years old (48).

When your cat is 12 he is equivalent to retirement age (64).

The average lifespan for a cat is around 14 years (72), but many live to 17 (83) and some even to 20 (92) years old.

According to the Guinness World of Records the world's oldest cat is Creme Puff from Texas who was 37 in 2004 - work that one out!

[www.fabcats.org](http://www.fabcats.org)

## FAB's full range of Cat Friendly Practice leaflets

- Bringing your cat to the vet
- Giving medicine to your cat
- Feeding a poorly cat
- Your cat is having an operation
- Preventing health problems
- Insuring your cat
- Choosing a boarding cattery
- Common household poisons and cats
- Why do cats..?

For more information on cat care  
[www.fabcats.org](http://www.fabcats.org)

### The Feline Advisory Bureau (FAB)

Set up almost 50 years ago, FAB's work now provides essential information for cat owners and expert information for people working with cats such as veterinary surgeons, breeders, cattery owners and rescue centres. Through our feline expert panel (a group of veterinary surgeons funded by FAB to specialise in feline care at UK veterinary universities) FAB has gathered a wealth of information on both common and rare conditions.

We're not just interested in veterinary treatment; our experts understand that a cat's home environment and lifestyle can have a huge influence on its health and well being. FAB is interested in the whole cat! The more owners understand cats and their behaviour the better they will be at spotting problems and giving TLC when a cat needs it most.

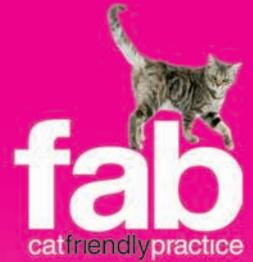
For over 400 pages of information on cat care go to FAB's website. We're already helping over 1 million cat owners a year.

Feline Advisory Bureau  
Taeselbury, High Street  
Tisbury, Wiltshire  
SP3 6LD  
T 0870 742 2278  
F 01747 871 873  
E [information@fabcats.org](mailto:information@fabcats.org)

Registered Charity No. 254641



## Why do cats...?



from the Feline Advisory Bureau



sponsored by



direct line

