

SEPARATION ANXIETY IN CATS

Most people don't know that separation anxiety affects animals as well as people. Cats with separation anxiety don't howl or chew on doors and windowsills in frantic attempts to escape. Separation anxiety in any species implies a lack of confidence and an over-dependence on others. It is likely that genetic factors play a role in increasing susceptibility to separation anxiety. Ultimately, environmental factors are responsible for its expression. Certain oriental breeds, such as Siamese and Burmese, may be more prone to develop separation anxiety than cats with more robust temperaments like Maine Coons.

Environmental factors often involve improper bonding experiences when cats are young. Orphaned kittens, early-weaned kittens, and pet store bought kittens are probably at the greatest risk of developing this stressful condition.

Signs of feline separation anxiety

- Over-attachment to the owner, following that person from room around the house.
- Distress as the owner prepares to leave. This can take many forms but some of the more common presentations are meowing, sulking, apparent depression, slinking away and hiding.
- Vocalization (crying, moaning, meowing) right after the owner has left. (You may need a tape recorder to check this sign).
- Excessive self-grooming. This starts as a displacement behavior but can progress to compulsive self-grooming if unchecked.
- Exuberant greeting behavior – as if greeting a long lost friend that they did not expect to see ever again.

Treatment

Enriching the cat's "home alone" environment may also help. This can be achieved by means of:

- Climbing frames positioned to give the cat a good view of the outside world.
- Strategically positioned windowpane bird feeders.
- An assortment of mobile toys perhaps enhanced with catnip.
- Leaving the radio on, the "white noise" effect of the radio drowns out the otherwise sounds of silence.

- Putting the day's ration of kibble in a buster cube, put down by the owner upon leaving. The food puzzle should be available only when the owner is away and should be picked up the moment they return.