

The 10 most-searched questions about cats

We know you've "Googled" when it comes to your pet. In fact, Google released the 10 most-searched questions pet owners asked about their cats last year. So, instead of leaving the answers to a Google algorithm, here are some veterinary experts to answer your queries so you can get to the bottom of questions like, "Why do cats like boxes?"

Google is a great tool, but if you ever have a question regarding your pet, never hesitate to contact us. We're here to answer the serious to merely curious questions—we're happy to do it! In the meantime, see how John Ciribassi, DVM, DACVB, Elizabeth Colleran, DVM, DAVBP (feline practice) and Ernie Ward, DVM, answer your most pressing questions about Fluffy.



1. Why do cats purr?

>Purring occurs as a result of vibration of vocal cords due to neurological stimulation from brain activity. The purpose is uncertain but it does seem to be associated with pleasurable activity. However, cats are also known to purr

when ill or injured, which lead some to believe that the frequency of the vibration can be associated with greater healing. Purring also is reinforcing for people and therefore can increase the amount of petting. —*Dr. Ciribassi*

>Cats generally purr when in contact with someone; a favored owner stroking, nursing a kitten, or greeting a familiar partner-cat. Positive experiences also elicit purring, rolling or rubbing, being in a warm familiar environment or about to fall peacefully asleep. —*Dr. Colleran*

2. How long do cats live?

>Average life span in cats is around 15 years. This can vary widely depending on the health of the cat, nutrition and preventive care. We have had cats in our practice live to 22 years. —*Dr. Ciribassi*

>Outdoor cats often live shorter lives than indoor. Being overweight or obese shortens life by 1 to 2.5 years on average. Regular health care, physical

examinations, parasite prevention and vaccinations provide protection against threats to life and health.—*Dr. Colleran*

>House cats can expect to live 15 to 20 years, with some reaching 25. Advances in preventing kitten-hood diseases such as distemper and feline leukemia, heartworms and other parasites, are key in extending longevity, along with better diets. Indoor cats face fewer threats from predators and trauma, but indoor cats also are facing an obesity epidemic leading to skyrocketing rates of diabetes. —*Dr. Ward*



3. Why do cats knead?

>Kneading behavior in cats is a reflection of instinctual behavior from kittenhood. Kittens knead the mammary glands of the queen to stimulate milk production. I see this in older kittens and cats when they are content and are attempting to solicit attention. —*Dr. Ciribassi*

>Cats knead for two reasons. While settling down to rest, some cats will knead soft places as if to prepare it to lie comfortably. This may be from a time when vegetation would be knocked down to make a safe sleeping place. Kittens knead the queen to help with milk release when nursing. —*Dr. Colleran*

>One theory is kneading cats are marking territory with special scent glands located in the paws. Another is that kneading is a lingering behavior from suckling. Finally, kneading may be a form of stretching or it just plain feels good. —*Dr. Ward*



4. Why do cats sleep so much?

>Often they appear to be asleep but are instantly awakened; this type of sleep varies with another deeper one. They tend to sleep in short increments of 10 to 30 minutes, so they are probably not sleeping as much as we think.

—*Dr. Colleran*

>Cats sleep an average of 16 to 18 hours a day. One reason is energy conservation. Cats use a special form of sugar to fuel their short bursts of activity. It takes a while to restore this energy so cats are careful when and why they rush into action. Cats are most active at dawn and dusk, so to balance their instinct and our human schedules, they end up taking lots of "cat naps." —*Dr. Ward*



5. Why do cats have whiskers?



>They are very sensitive sense organs and tell a cat a lot about his position in space and what is going on around him. They appear to be particularly useful in low light and darkness, times when other organs cannot collect as much information.—*Dr. Colleran*

>Whiskers are highly sensitive and

help inform the cat about surrounding objects, air movements and more. Whiskers may also be used to gauge whether a cat can slip into a tight space. You can also tell if a cat is nervous or scared if the whiskers are pointing forward at a potential threat. Whatever you do, don't trim or pluck whiskers because they serve an important information source for cats. —*Dr. Ward*

6. What does catnip do to cats?



>Catnip is an herb. About half of cats are genetically likely to respond to active oil in catnip. It is not certain what part of the brain is stimulated by this ingredient but it is not harmful and can be used to help increase use of items like scratching posts. Many treats have

this to help stimulate play. —*Dr. Ciribassi*

>The aroma of catnip in cats is thought to be quite pleasurable. It has no other significance and seems to be a genetic accident. It is an autosomal dominant trait, so not all cats are sensitive. —*Dr. Colleran*

7. Why do cats hate water?



>There are many types and breeds of cats that are comfortable around or in water. Many cats will fish for food. The Turkish Van and Maine Coon seem to like water—even being immersed in it. For those that don't like it, it may be related to the way their fur is constructed. It isn't made for drenching

and can become quite heavy when it is. —*Dr. Colleran*

8. Why do cats eat grass?

>One theory is that it is an evolutionary adaption to intestinal parasites and may serve as a purging mechanism. The taste of sweet moist grass may help to explain it as well as there are some observers who think it is more common with new spring grass. —*Dr. Colleran*

>Most veterinarians agree grass eating seems to be a way

for cats to relieve gastrointestinal (GI) symptoms, parasites or possibly infections. Another theory is that cats are craving micronutrients found in leafy plants. Finally, cats may eat grass simply because they like it. It's important to note some cats suffering from inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) may be misdiagnosed as "grass eaters." —*Dr. Ward*



9. Why do cats like boxes?

>Cats like to hide and yet be able to see what is going on around them. The opening gives them the view and the sides of the box can protect them from being seen by predators. Remember cats are today the same cats they were 10,000 years ago when they hunted and avoided predators to survive. —*Dr. Colleran*



10. What is a group of cats called?

>It is called a clowder or a glaring. —*Dr. Ciribassi*

>A group of related kittens is a litter. A few litters are a kindle. —*Dr. Colleran*

>Clowder originates in Middle English from the term "clotter," which meant, "to huddle together." It also has roots in "clutter" which is what my clowder creates in my house. —*Dr. Ward*



Dr. John Ciribassi, DVM, DACVB, founded the animal behavior specialty practice Chicagoland Veterinary Behavior Consultants located in Buffalo Grove, Bensenville and Chicago, Illinois. Ciribassi is a board certified veterinary behaviorist and has served as president of the Chicago Veterinary Medical Association as well as president of the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB).



Dr. Elizabeth Colleran, DVM, DAVBP (feline practice), is a veterinarian at Chico Hospital for Cats in Chico, California. Dr. Colleran graduated from Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine in 1990 and earned a Masters of Science in Animals and Public Policy at Tufts in 1996. In 2011, she was the president of the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP). She is a Diplomate of the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners, Specialty in Feline Practice. Dr. Colleran speaks at major conferences around the country.



Dr. Ernie Ward, DVM, a veterinarian, author, speaker and media personality, has dedicated his life and career to promoting a healthier lifestyle for people and pets. Known as "America's Pet Advocate," Ward founded the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention (APOPP) in 2005. He lives with his wife and daughters in coastal North Carolina where he began his career with his clinic, Seaside Animal Care, in 1993. He's also a certified personal trainer and USA Triathlon certified coach.

