



My Cat is Eating Weird Things

The first step with any behavioral issue is to take your cat to the veterinarian for a full evaluation. Cats are very stoic animals and will hide illness and injury. Sometimes our only clue that something is physically wrong is a behavioral symptom. Many behavioral modification programs can begin in conjunction with or shortly after your trip to the veterinarian.

Cats under one year of age will sometimes display suckling behaviors on soft items like blankets. This behavior will either extinguish itself but in other cases behavior modification should be used to prevent the behavior from escalating to eating non-food items. Eating non-food items (called pica) like rubber bands, yarn or string could result in a serious medical emergency.

There are several possible reasons for suckling behavior to develop: weaning too early or abruptly, separation anxiety, sudden change in environment, lack of stimulation, lack of nutrition or an underlying medical condition. Oriental breeds are more likely to develop wool suckling behaviors but it can occur in any breed.

*The experts at the William R. Pritchard Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital at University of California, Davis, as well as other vets and animal behaviorists, suggest the following actions:

- **Remove targeted items.** The easiest solution may be simply to hide the clothes, plants, or other items your cat loves to chew on.
- **Give your cat something else to chew.** Divert your cat's need to chew toward safer, more appropriate things like cat toys inside which you can hide an edible treat or some other appealing item made specifically for cats. To keep grass-eating cats from sampling houseplants, try growing catnip or a small pot of grass for your cat to nibble on. But keep watch. "Sometimes a cat ends up eating the potting material as well as the grass," Moon-Fanelli says. The result? Diarrhea.
- **Play with your cat.** Some cats that chew are just bored or lonely. So make time for your attention-starved feline friend by giving her more mental or physical stimulation. You could train your cat to wear a harness and teach her to take walks, suggests Moon-Fanelli. Some cats enjoy outdoor enclosures where they can watch birds and other stimulating things.
- **Make appealing items unappealing.** Applying strong-smelling substances like citrus air-freshener or foul-tasting things like hot sauce, Bandguard, or Bitter Apple to items like power cords can cause a cat to steer clear.

- **Get rid of dangerous plants.** If your cat is attracted to houseplants, get rid of those that are considered toxic to pets. You can find out which plants are poisonous to cats at the web site of the ASPCA.
- **Talk to an animal behaviorist.** If your cat continues to eat non-food items and you know it's not a medical issue, look for a certified applied animal behaviorist (CAAB), suggests Moon-Fanelli. Many CAABs offer remote consultations and can work closely with your own veterinarian.

As well, many houseplants are toxic to cats; chewing or eating these plants can have mild symptoms as well as fatality. If your cat has a history of ingesting non-food items and becomes lethargic, vomits, or displays other concerning behavior, take them to your veterinarian immediately. (See the ASPCA's full list of [plants toxic to cats](#).)*

*This information was found at <http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/unusual-cat-cravings?page=2>

If after trying these suggestions you are still experiencing undesirable behaviors in your cat, SUBMIT QUESTIONS by clicking the link under Ask A Trainer on the Behavior and Training page of the Wayside Waifs website: www.waysidewaifs.org.

Written by the Wayside Waifs Animal Behavior Team

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