

“Get Off That!”

Detering Cats from Specific Areas

“Our cat, Sparkles, is really driving us crazy. She constantly jumps up on the counters and knocks everything off. We come home from work to find our things all over the floor. She even does this when we are sitting right in the room. We yell and chase her off the counters, but this doesn’t seem to affect her in the least; an hour later she’s right back up there.”

Cats are playful creatures that can turn anything into a toy. They are also great at figuring out what they need to do to get us to jump out of our chairs and chase them through the house –Oh! What fun! Cats also prefer a view of the world from above. They love to perch on top of the refrigerator, the back of your couch, or even your fireplace mantel. All of these factors have combined to create a behavior that you find unacceptable. To keep your blood pressure down and your items safe, you’ll have to deal with each issue.

How do we keep a cat off the kitchen table, the counters, the fireplace mantel, or any other place they decide to go? Most cat owners don’t understand why their furry friends don’t learn that some places are out of limits. They yell, throw things, spray water, some even swat at their kitties, all to no avail. Physical punishment or screaming, only teaches their cat to be afraid of them. Cats don’t learn **right** from **wrong**; they learn **safe** from **unsafe**. It’s not long before they figure out that while it’s unsafe to do certain things when their owners around, it is perfectly safe to them when they aren’t.

Step 1: Provide safe alternatives for your cat

- As mentioned previously, cats often seek high vantage points. Provide several acceptable perching areas around the house.
 - Favorite perching places are often by windows, or warm, sunny spots.
 - You can use cat trees or shelves as perches. There are many commercially available products available via pet stores and online retailers.
- Perhaps your cat is jumping on areas and knocking things over because it’s fun or because they know they will get attention from you.
 - Remember that negative attention (such as yelling) is still attention.
 - Try playing with your cat 10-15 minutes at the same time every night (cats love routine) to give them the attention they are seeking.
 - Providing other play-things, such as Ping-Pong balls in the bathroom or paper bags (with the handles cut off) to hide and play in will keep your cat engaged when you are away.
- Perhaps your cat is getting on a particular piece of furniture. Providing an alternative cat-appropriate piece of furniture is ideal. Make the appropriate furniture appealing with soft blankets and hidden treats or toys.
- Perhaps your cat is jumping on the counter for meal times. During these times, give your cat something to do like a food puzzle as an “appetizer” or give really yummy treats on their bed. Eventually your cat will learn that good things happen on the ground.
- ***Enriching a cat’s environment can solve many behavioral problems.***



Step 2: Deter your cat from inappropriate areas



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- Make areas aversive/unpleasant so your kitty no longer wants to go there without damaging your relationship. You can use aversive sounds, textures, or smells to “booby trap” off limit areas until the cat learns to stay away. Then you can be the “good guy”, encouraging and rewarding appropriate behavior.
 - Texture options such as sticky paper, aluminum foil, or a plastic carpet runner (nubby side up) can be placed on forbidden areas. Cats hate the feeling of these things under their feet.
 - Obnoxious smells can also keep a cat away such as citronella, perfumes, solid air fresheners, citrus, aloe, or eucalyptus oil. Soak pieces of cloth or cotton balls in the smelly substance and place them strategically.
 - Loud sounds may also deter your cat from the area. The trick with sounds is to not have the cat associate you with the sound (so the sound needs to happen even when you aren’t home). Options include a pyramid of empty soda cans that fall when disturbed, or baking sheets balanced on the edge of the surface. A pricier option may be a motion detector that emits an alarm or spray of citronella.
 - These events are designed to simply startle your cat, not terrify them. If you have a particularly sensitive cat, loud noise may not be the method to use.



If your cat continues to get on surfaces you don’t like, or if having other behavior concerns, reach out to Mountain Humane’s behavior department at (208) 788-4351 ext. 114 or behavior@mountainhumane.org.