

## Your Anxious Cat

**Separation anxiety can cause your cat to act out. Here's how to identify and treat this condition.**

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Posted: Tue Nov 30 00:00:00 PST 2004

Many busy people look to cats when choosing a pet, confident that their new companion will fare well while they are gone all day. That is until they return home to find evidence to the contrary. Maybe their furry friend constantly follows them around the house or leaves a smelly deposit in the middle of the bed. These are just two signs that your cat is experiencing separation anxiety. Please Don't Leave "Separation anxiety is a disorder in which an animal panics when its primary caregiver is not present," says Melissa Bain, DVM, of the University of California-Davis School of Veterinary Medicine. "This can occur when all owners are completely out of the house, when one owner is [absent] and someone is still present with the animal, or when the animal is merely separated from the owner, such as by a doorway," Bain says. The reasons for this disorder are not completely understood. "Separation anxiety is commonly seen in social species such as cats, dogs, birds, horses and primates," says Michelle Bamberger, DVM, owner of Vet Behavior Consults in Ithaca, N.Y. "The general belief is that separation anxiety would not occur without the tendency of a species to form strong social bonds." What to Look for "Cats exhibit separation anxiety, but to a less-visible degree [than dogs]," says Ilana Reisner, VMD, Ph.D., of the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine. "Because cats don't bark, neighbors don't alert owners to problems." Signs of this disorder include: 1. Urinating and defecating outside the litterbox, often on their owner's personal possessions such as on clothes or beds. 2. Becoming overly attached to owners and following them around the house. 3. Expressing anxiety as the owner prepares to leave or has already left, shown by increased vocalization, sulking and hiding. 4. Vomiting only in the owner's absence.