

## My Cat Eats Everything in Sight

**CatChannel behavior expert Marilyn Krieger, CCBC, discusses a condition called pica, which should be taken seriously.**

*By Marilyn Krieger*

Posted: Feb. 13, 2009, 3 a.m. EST

**Q:** I have had my Birman cat Chloe for almost four years now. She is the most lovable cat I have ever had. She has no fear of anything and welcomes everyone into our house. She is the perfect pet except for one very annoying behavior problem. She chews everything! Our couch pillows always have corners chewed off of them; hence, we have no more pillows. She chews holes in our towels, clothes and blankets. If we leave a photograph out, she chews holes in it. I took her to the vet and he checked her teeth and said she was very healthy. He suggested we pick everything up. Impossible! As I said, she chews everything! As I am folding laundry, she will grab the socks and underwear and try to chew them.

We love her very much but she definitely makes keeping a house in order very hard!

**A:** Chloe has pica. Pica is ingesting items that are inedible. Pica has to be taken very seriously because it is possible for cats to swallow items that can cause obstructions and require surgery. One of my clients has a cat who required surgery after eating a pillow; another became seriously ill after eating a wooden window shutter. Arnold Plotnick, DVM, wrote an article in November's CAT FANCY about a cat who ate rubber hair bands, a surgical towel, ribbon and paper.

There are many possible reasons for pica; some are medical and dietary others are behavioral. It is mandatory to take a cat to a veterinarian for a thorough evaluation if she has pica. Cats suffering from behavioral-caused pica are often prescribed a course of medication coupled with a consultation from credentialed cat behaviorist. The cat behaviorist will be able to provide behavior-modification recommendations.

Picking up items around the house that the cat might eat is a necessity. If you have a cat like Chloe, who eats everything, that can be a challenge. Along with the environmental management, there are some other activities that will help Chloe with her pica issues.

Start by providing her with healthy, safe items to chew. A couple of these items should include dental chew toys and turkey or chicken jerky that contain no spices (there are some available that are formulated specifically for cats and dogs). There are other acceptable chew items as well.

Provide Chloe with lots of environmental enrichment and interactive toys. Buy or make her tall cat trees that have lots of wide shelves. Locating them next to secure windows will provide her with entertainment. Turbo Scratchers and wooden puzzle boxes are a couple of good choices for interactive toys. The toys need to be made of materials that she can't munch.

Put Chloe on a schedule. She needs consistency. Feed her at the same times every day. I encourage feeding her lots of small meals throughout the day. Since that is a challenge for most people, consider buying her a timed feeding station. There are a couple of models that dispense canned food; others dispense dry food. Consider not putting her dry food in a bowl. Instead put her dry food in treat balls. Treat balls are hollow plastic balls with holes in them. In order to eat, she'll have to work for the food by rolling the ball around. If she likes to be groomed, then groom her every day at the same time. Play with her, using a fishing pole toy a couple of times during the day, always around the same times. Clicker training is another activity that can refocus Chloe away from eating your house and everything in it.

**Editor's Note:** Marilyn Krieger will be interviewed about cat behavior by Ronn Owens at 8 a.m. EST Friday, Feb. 13, on KGO-810 AM radio. The interview will be streamed on the radio's web site.