

Why Does My Cat Scratch the Wall and Floor?

CatChannel behavior expert Marilyn Krieger, CCBC, explains why cats scratch after eating and using the litterbox.

By Marilyn Krieger

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Q: I have two cats; one is 10 and the youngest is 5. The youngest cat lbby Ditty has always scratched the floor or the wall after she eats or after she uses the litterbox. Why does she do this? She does cover after using the litter and then proceeds to scratch the wall next to it. She has always done this.

A: The wall and floor scratching behaviors you are describing are common cat behaviors. The reasons for the behaviors are different for both of the situations that you have asked about.

Cats who scratch the floor or wall after using the litterbox are usually making a comment about the litterbox itself and or the litter that is being used. Often the cat box is too small for the cat or there isn't enough litter or there's too much litter in the cat box. Sometimes cats will engage in this behavior if the litterbox isn't clean enough.

Ideally, the cat litter should be about 3 inches deep. This is deep enough for the cat to adequately bury her excrement. Litterboxes also need to be scooped on a daily basis and completely dumped, cleaned and refilled with fresh litter every few weeks. Litterboxes are also a factor to consider. I find that most commercial litter boxes are too small for most cats. I recommend uncovered 66-quart Sterilite storage containers. These are large, translucent storage containers that the cat can easily turn around in and when filled with about 3 inches of litter, dig in, to her heart's content.

Ms. Ditty's motivation for scratching the floor and wall around her food after she eats differs from why she's scratching the wall after using her litterbox. If there was a paper towel or other easy-to-move object near the food dish, she would probably cover her food with it, moving it by scratching and pulling at it with her claws. Often this behavior can be observed in our little domestic cats as well as wild cats, after eating. There may be a few crumbs left, or a substantial amount that hasn't been eaten. Covering the food theoretically keeps other predators from finding it and ups the odds that there will be food available for later. Additionally, covering the uneaten food can help keep the cat safe, since the smell of food attracts predators and other hungry animals.