

Dear Tabby

Experts answer your kitten's questions in terms that humans can understand.

Marty Becker, DVM, and Janice Willard, DVM

But this also increases the danger to kittens that are good at going up, but not so good at coming down. The trees you get stuck in on the outside have bark and branches to hang on to. Indoor trees bookshelves, for instance don't, and can have things like speaker wires to entangle an exploring kitten or collectible figurines precariously perched that can break and make your owners really mad. Better that your human family give you safe indoor "trees" to climb and keep you in a smaller safe space when they are not around to monitor your family room gymnastics.

My mom purrs when she gets massaged. Me, not only do I purr, but when I'm really happy I alternately extend and retract my nails. Why the need to knead?

You have needed to knead since the day you were born, practically since the minute you were born. Before you were even dry from being born, you latched onto your mommy's nipple and started drinking ambrosia your mommy's milk. You couldn't see or hear yet, but you could taste this most wonderful thing. And as you sucked, your tiny paws kneaded your mamma's belly to help stimulate her milk flow. Even though it has a biological reason, kneading is associated with those comforting times when your mommy was your entire universe, giving you warmth and sustenance. So now, when you feel warm and comforted, your paws tap dance like they did on mamma's tummy.

Seems all babies have oral fixations. That pesky human baby always has something in its mouth. I like to chew or even suck on fabric like, dare I say, a pacifier. I'm really gnawing for an explanation.

What you are really doing is still looking for Mommy. After you started to eat solid food, you still derived considerable comfort from nursing on mom. Suckling is an essential behavior at birth, without which you never would have survived. So the drive to suck is very strong. "Cats that chew or suck on fabrics are more often pure or partial Orientals," explained Linda Aronson, DVM, a veterinary behaviorist at PetShrink in Norfolk, Mass. "It has been suggested that this behavior results when kittens are weaned too early from their mothers. Some feel that Siamese and related breeds may need to nurse longer and should not be separated from their mothers until at least 12 weeks. Cats that suck and chew on fabric do seem to become obsessed with the behavior. If you remove the material they prefer to chew, they may just switch to another fabric."