

MY CAT KEEPS FIGHTING WITH OTHER CATS IN THE AREA

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

MY CAT'S BEEN IN A FIGHT – WHAT SHOULD I DO?

If your cat has just been in a fight it is best to confine them indoors but not to give them too much immediate hands-on attention – cats can be very aroused when they have just been fighting and they are best left alone for a while to calm down.

Superficial cuts and scratches are common fight injuries and easily seen, but bite wounds are often difficult to detect as a cat's teeth puncture the skin causing deep but narrow holes that quickly heal over, trapping bacteria inside which can subsequently form an abscess. If your cat hides, seems listless, withdrawn or lame after a fight then you should consult your vet.

MY CAT KEEPS FIGHTING WITH OTHER CATS IN THE AREA – WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Cats are territorial creatures and many will actively defend an area that they consider to be their own. With your cat, for example, this could be part or all of your garden or outside space or further afield.

Cats communicate with each other via scent that they leave on objects so they can make their presence felt without actually encountering other cats directly. Most cats avoid fighting at all costs as it is not a good strategy for their survival.

However, there may be occasions when two cats meet and fighting takes place, based on the experience of previous encounters or the confidence the cat feels when facing a particular individual in their territory.

In general, male cats, particularly if they are not neutered, tend to roam further and are more likely to fight but this is not a hard and fast rule. Many cats are very tolerant about the presence of others on their 'patch' but some can be true to their origins as a solitary, territorial species and be more willing to fight.

You may wish to consider securing your garden or outside space with a commercially available system that can be installed to keep your own cat in and other strange cats out. This would immediately stop the fighting but if

your cat is used to roaming beyond your boundaries or has been travelling further to acquire their own territory elsewhere, this could be distressing for them.

If you have noticed that your cat is staying indoors more often or remaining within the garden, the option of securing it would probably work very well.

HOW DO I FIND OUT WHETHER MY CAT IS STARTING THE FIGHTS OR IS AN INNOCENT VICTIM?

It is often difficult, when your cat has been fighting, to establish whether this is with one or more cats and whether they are the victim or the one to initiate it. Vets will often say that the location of any cat bite wound is a good indicator of whether the fight was won or lost, i.e. if the wound is on the tail or hind quarters the injured cat was probably trying to escape and if the wound is on the head then the cat likely wasn't backing down.

You could do some detective work; there may be an unowned tom cat in the vicinity or you may be living in an area where the population of cats is very high and each cat is struggling to establish their own territory.

You can speak to your cat-owning neighbours to see if they can help you to ask around to get a better idea of what the local cat population is and where they live. Someone may have seen a particular cat, even yours, in a fight and can provide you with more details.

In reality, even though you may feel a sense of injustice if you find your cat is the innocent victim, you still may need to do something yourself to protect them.

WHAT IF I ESTABLISH THE LOCAL CAT RESPONSIBLE FOR FIGHTING WITH MY CAT?

If you get some eye witness evidence, you may establish at least one cat that yours is fighting with. A certain amount of fighting in a territory that is shared by many cats is almost inevitable but if this is something that is happening on a very regular basis, for example two or three times a week, you may need to take further steps.

Firstly, you need to ensure that the cat they are fighting with is owned. If there is no evidence of an owner and local neighbours believe they are an un-neutered stray you may be able to request assistance from a cat charity to humanely trap the cat, have them neutered (if necessary) and found an appropriate home. They will be able to scan the cat, once caught, to ensure there is no microchip with details of ownership.

If the cat is owned you could consider discussing the problem with the owner but you rely on the owners' goodwill, rather than a legal obligation, to do anything specific to prevent this from happening. They may agree to confine their cat indoors at night if the fighting occurs during the hours of darkness, enabling other owners to know that their own cats are safe at these times. This may also work if the confinement takes place during the day if their cat has more nocturnal habits. Feeding the cat a late night treat may be sufficient incentive for them to come in at the required time.

You would also benefit from installing (if you haven't got one already) a microchip-operated cat flap which allows only your cat access into your home by reading their unique microchip identification that is hidden under the skin on the back of their neck.

For further reading on cat flaps and microchips, please see advice sheets [Information on cat flaps and how to encourage your cat to use one](#) and [How do I keep my cat's microchip details up to date](#).

Many victims of persistent attacks become reluctant to go outside so it is important to make your cat feel as secure as possible indoors by providing an indoor litter tray (if you haven't got one already) and giving them plenty of places to rest and hide at home. The microchip-operated cat flap will ensure that the other cat will not gain access to your home.

It may be helpful, if the fighting is taking place in your garden or outside space, to make the route in as difficult as possible for the other cat to gain access. For example, see if you can establish any well-trodden paths that the other cat has used which you may be able to block off, such as gaps under fences and gates.

Most healthy cats can scale a six-foot fence with ease so the cat may just jump over the fence or gate instead but making the process complicated may be sufficient to redirect some cats to use an alternative thoroughfare.

HOW LONG DOES FIGHTING BETWEEN TWO CATS GO ON FOR?

It is fairly rare for two cats to fight regularly on a long-term basis as most will learn to predict the other's habits and avoid areas where the cat is likely to be (based on the scent marks that the cat is leaving behind).

Fights are won or lost on the day and only the minority of disputes remain unsettled, in which case fighting between two specific cats may occur from time to time.

AM I LIABLE FOR THE VETERINARY COSTS IF MY CAT INJURES SOMEONE ELSE'S CAT?

While inter-cat disputes are accepted by most owners as inevitable, on rare occasions the consequences can become serious – especially in those cases where frequent injuries are inflicted by one particularly assertive individual.

The resulting disputes between cat-owning neighbours can escalate and lead to threatening behaviour and even, in extreme cases, police involvement.

In severe situations, the cat's behaviour can be considered a 'nuisance' in legal terms, particularly if it causes damage to property or people are getting injured. The local council could serve an abatement notice, forcing the owner to take steps to prevent the nuisance that is being caused by their cat. Failure to comply with this notice is a criminal offence, but this is something that very rarely results in prosecution.

Rehoming to an area with a low cat population is often a solution that works well for the community and the cats in question.