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WHY DOES MY CAT SMELL?



# WHY DOES MY CAT SMELL?

Cats are renowned for their careful grooming habits, so it can be puzzling and even concerning when your feline friend starts to emit an unpleasant smell. If you've found yourself wondering, "why does my cat smell," - it's a question many cat parents ask.

While most cats are naturally clean and odourless, various factors can lead to unwanted scents, ranging from temporary issues to signs of underlying health problems. Understanding the potential reasons behind it is the first step to resolving the issue.

Contrary to popular belief, a smelly cat doesn't necessarily mean poor hygiene. Cats may release odours related to pheromones, which are natural and not indicative of health concerns. However, persistent or unusual cat smells could signal issues like dental problems, skin infections, or dietary concerns that require attention.

For cat parents, understanding the potential causes behind why a cat smells is essential to maintaining their comfort and well-being. Whether it's an issue with grooming, health, or their environment, identifying and addressing the cause is the first step. To learn more about tackling specific odours, including accidents, visit our guide on how to get rid of cat pee smell.

This article explores the reasons behind odours in cats, dispelling common misconceptions about cat smells and offering actionable advice for cat owners who want their companions to stay clean and happy.

## Common reasons why your cat smells

There are a variety of reasons why you may ask, "why does my cat smell?" From dental issues to skin infections, several factors can cause unpleasant odours in cats. It's important

to distinguish between temporary smells and ongoing issues that might require medical attention. In this section, we'll explore the most common causes of cat smells and explain when seeking veterinary care is essential.

## Dental issues

If you're wondering, "why does my cat smell?" dental hygiene is often a prevalent issue. Dental problems are one of the most common reasons cats develop unpleasant odours.

Gingivitis is the term used to describe inflammation of the gums, which you'll see as a reddening of the gum line where the tooth meets the gum. If left untreated, this progresses to periodontal disease (gum disease), which causes discomfort and bad breath.

Symptoms like drooling or difficulty eating may also signal a dental problem. To care for your cat's oral health, book regular dental check-ups and use vet-approved products for at-home care. Understanding what teething is and starting a daily oral care regime such as toothbrushing can also prevent early dental issues from escalating for younger cats.

## Skin infections

Skin infections can also explain why cat parents often say, 'my cat smells.' Conditions caused by bacteria, yeast, or wounds are a common reason for persistent odours in cats. Regular grooming and vet check-ups can help prevent this.

Skin infections may result from allergies, overgrooming, or injuries and often cause lingering cat smells accompanied by redness, scabs, or an oily coat.

It's important to distinguish between temporary smells, such as environmental odours, and ongoing issues, like skin infections, that require prompt veterinary care. Regular grooming with vet-approved products helps maintain a healthy coat, prevents diseases, and will help nurture your cat's overall well-being.

## Ear infections

Ear infections are a common source of unpleasant odours in cats. Caused by bacteria, yeast, or ear mites, these infections can result in a musty or sour smell. Symptoms often include head shaking, excessive scratching, redness, and waxy discharge.

- **Temporary vs. ongoing:** while occasional ear wax build-up is normal, persistent odours or discomfort may indicate an infection that requires veterinary attention.
- **Prevention:** regular ear checks and gentle cleaning with vet-approved products can help prevent infections and keep your cat healthy. Early intervention is crucial in avoiding chronic ear issues, especially if your cat smells unusual around its ears.

## Anal glands

Anal glands naturally produce scent-marking odours that are strong for humans but normal for cats. These glands release signals for communication, but infections, abscesses, or gland impactions can result in unpleasant smells, leading owners to ask, "why does my cat smell like faeces?".

Symptoms include scooting, excessive licking, or swelling near the tail. While occasional odours are typical, persistent or worsening smells should be investigated by a vet. Timely

care can prevent discomfort and long-term complications. Regular check-ups help maintain healthy glands and ensure your cat stays comfortable and odour-free.

### Poor Diet and Digestion

Diet plays a vital role in your cat’s smell. Food intolerances, low-quality diets, eating something unpleasant outdoors or digestive upsets may lead to flatulence or bad breath, causing cat parents to ask, “why does my cat smell?”

Transitioning to a high-quality, complete, and balanced cat food tailored for your cat's life stage and lifestyle can improve digestion and reduce unpleasant odours. Persistent digestive issues, like diarrhoea or bloating, warrant a vet visit to identify potential intolerances or allergies. A balanced diet nurtures your cat’s health and promotes a fresher, cleaner-smelling pet.

### Urinary Issues

Many cat owners tend to think, ‘my cat smells’ due to litter box hygiene, but urinary tract infections could be the real culprit when dealing with strong odours. Keep an eye on symptoms that may include straining to urinate, more frequent visits to the litter tray, blood in the urine, or accidents outside the litter tray.

Regular litter box cleaning helps monitor for signs of UTIs, while persistent symptoms require prompt veterinary care. Proper hydration and a clean litter tray can reduce risks and prevent unpleasant cat smells, ensuring your cat’s urinary health and overall comfort are well-maintained.

### Environmental Factors

Environmental exposure is a common reason cat smells develop. Cats spend a great deal of time outdoors, and can expose them to food waste, dirt or other substances that temporarily cause your cat's smell to worsen. Regular grooming and cleaning your cat’s bedding, litter box, and living area will resolve these smells.

Maintaining a hygienic environment ensures your cat stays fresh, healthy, and comfortable while preventing unpleasant cat smells from recurring. However, persistent and unexplained odours may indicate another underlying issue that requires vet attention.

### Overgrooming and Hairballs

Excessive grooming can lead to odours caused by irritated skin or bacterial growth. Hairballs, a typical result of overgrooming or normal grooming for a long-haired cat, can also explain why your cat smells. Stress or boredom often triggers overgrooming, so providing mental stimulation and addressing potential stressors can help.

Persistent issues may require a vet’s guidance to rule out underlying conditions. Supporting your cat’s coat health with regular grooming ensures they remain fresh, comfortable, and stress-free.

## Why does my cat smell like faeces?

Cats may develop odours resembling faeces for several reasons, often related to hygiene or

health concerns. Improper grooming or faecal matter clinging to their fur are common culprits. Additionally, gastrointestinal issues such as diarrhoea can exacerbate the problem, making owners wonder, "why does my cat smell like faeces?"

Regularly inspect your cat's coat and clean any dirt or debris to manage this. Ensure cat litter trays are cleaned daily to prevent further contamination. Persistent smells may indicate an underlying issue, such as cat diarrhoea, which a veterinarian should evaluate.

Routine grooming, a clean environment, and prompt attention to digestive problems can help prevent these odours. For ongoing issues, consult your vet to identify the root cause and provide appropriate treatment, ensuring your cat's health and comfort.

## How to manage or prevent bad odours in your cat

Managing bad odours in your cat requires attention to grooming, hygiene, and health. These practical tips make you more likely to create a fresh-smelling home and ensure your cat is healthy and comfortable.

Here are some actionable steps to consider:

- **Regular grooming**: brush your cat's coat regularly to remove any dirt or debris from being outdoors. Brushing can also prevent matting, which can trap odours. A well-groomed cat is less likely to develop unpleasant smells from dirt or faecal matter. It's important to note that most cats love to be groomed as it's a natural bonding experience.
- **Clean litter tray**: keep your cat's litter tray clean by scooping daily and changing the litter regularly. This prevents odours from spreading and keeps your cat's environment fresh.

Cats are, by nature, very clean creatures. They will often refuse a soiled litter tray. Keeping the tray clean and fresh reduces the risk of them urinating elsewhere in the home.

- **Healthy diet**: a complete and balanced diet tailored to the life-stage and lifestyle of your cat helps support your cat's digestive system. It also helps reduce bad breath, flatulence, or other digestive-related odours.
- **Hydration**: ensuring your cat stays hydrated can help prevent urinary tract infections (UTIs), which are familiar sources of strong ammonia smells (strong and pungent odours often associated with cat urine).

  Ensure your cats have regular access to fresh water. Cats tend to be reluctant to drink much water. You can boost their natural hydration by including wet food (tins and pouches) into their daily diet alongside dry kibble.
- **Address behavioural issues**: if your cat is marking or spraying, consult our guide on cats spraying for tips to manage this behaviour and prevent odours.
- **Vet check-ups**: if odours persist, it's essential to consult a vet to rule out infections, skin issues, oral care issues, or underlying health conditions that could be causing the problem.

## When to visit the vet for cat odours

Cat's are naturally very clean animals, and it is not normal for them to smell. Suppose you cannot determine the source of cat smells or notice other concerning symptoms, such as

lethargy, loss of appetite, or changes in demeanour or grooming habits. In that case, it's time to consult a veterinarian. Persistent or unusual odours may signal underlying health issues that require immediate attention.

Your vet can identify the root cause of why your cat smells and recommend appropriate treatments or lifestyle adjustments to resolve the issue. However, ignoring these signs can lead to discomfort or more severe health problems for your cat.

Regular check-ups and early intervention ensure your pet stays healthy and comfortable while maintaining a fresh-smelling home. If you're unsure, don't hesitate to seek expert advice—your cat's well-being and peace of mind are worth it.

## Why does my cat smell? - Summary

Cats are naturally clean animals, so noticing unusual cat smells can be concerning. Common reasons include dental issues, skin infections, or urinary problems. Sometimes, odours like faecal smells can cause digestive issues or grooming difficulties. If you've wondered, 'why does my cat smell?' then use this guide to identify noticeable symptoms, find the cause, and take appropriate action.

Regular grooming, a complete and balanced diet, and proper hydration can ensure your cat stays healthy and odour-free. However, if unusual or strong smells persist, consult your vet to ensure your cat is healthy and address any underlying concerns.

For guidance on managing overgrooming or hygiene issues relevant to skin conditions and cat smells, visit our expert tips on cat grooming. You can keep your cat happy, healthy, and odour-free with the proper care and attention by using the actionable steps listed in this guide.

## Why does my cat smell? - FAQs

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1. **How do I stop my cat from being smelly?**

   To ensure you take action to prevent, or remedy the fact that your cat smells, groom your cat regularly, clean their litter box daily, and ensure they're on a healthy, vet-approved diet. Persistent odours may indicate health issues like infections or cat diarrhoea, so consult a vet if the smell continues.

2. **Why does my cat have a strange odour?**

   Strange odours can result from many things, including dental issues, skin infections, or urinary problems. If you've asked, "why does my cat smell," it's essential to monitor your cat's hygiene and behaviour. A vet should investigate persistent odours to identify and treat the root cause.

3. **Why does my cat have body odour?**

   Cats may develop body odour due to grooming problems, infections, or diet issues. Regular brushing and keeping their environment clean help prevent odours. If you're thinking, 'my cat smells unusually strong', it's best to consult a vet for further evaluation.

4. **Why is my cat smelling a lot?**

   If your cat smells persistently, it could be due to infections, poor hygiene, or environmental exposure. Regular grooming and check-ups can resolve most cases, but ongoing smells might require a vet's attention to address underlying health concerns.

5. **Is it normal for a cat to smell?**

   Cats are usually clean and odour-free. However, mild pheromone-related scents are normal. If you wonder why your cat smells or notice strong and unusual odours, this could indicate a health issue requiring professional care.

6. **Can older cats struggle with grooming themselves?**

   Senior cats may struggle with grooming as they age due to decreasing agility and joint discomfort. As a result, some cat smells may occur if they cannot maintain their coat. Regular brushing, damp cotton wool pads, and weight management can help. If your cat struggles, consult your vet for advice on grooming and health. Regular grooming with a soft brush can help keep their coat fresh.

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