

How to Keep Your Cat Off Tables and Counters

- Cats naturally like high places, so keeping them off tables and counters can be difficult.
- It's best not to try to stifle your cat's natural jumping and climbing behavior. Your cat will be happier if you provide him or her with acceptable options for climbing and jumping.
- Never chase your cat away from an unacceptable place or yell at him or her. These punishments often don't work and will teach your cat to fear you.
- Environmental "punishers" can be useful because they work when you aren't present; therefore, your cat won't associate you with the punishment or learn to wait until you're not around to go to unacceptable places.

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Cats naturally like high places, so keeping them off tables and counters can be difficult. Some people prefer that their cats stay off these surfaces for the following reasons:

- Cats may steal food and find harmful items, such as chicken bones.
- Cats can carry trace amounts of urine and feces from the litterbox to surfaces where people prepare and eat food.

These problems can be reduced if you clean your tables and counters regularly and don't leave food out unattended. It can also help to understand your cat's behavior and how to best change it.

Why Cats Like High Places

Cats like high places, such as tables and counters, for several reasons:

- High places give cats vantage points from which to survey their territory.
- High places provide safety from other household pets or anything else that scares cats.

- Elevated surfaces can become warm, safe places to sunbathe. The top of the refrigerator is another warm favorite of cats.
- Tables and counters can be a source of food and crumbs.

Providing Alternatives

It's best not to try to stifle your cat's natural jumping and climbing behavior. Your cat will be happier if you provide him or her with acceptable options for climbing and jumping. If you don't, your cat will likely continue to go to unacceptable places.

Indoor cat "tree" furniture with bark or sisal posts and comfortable platforms and hiding places is ideal for cats. To add to the appeal of a cat tree, you can place comfortable bedding on the platforms or in the hiding places. You can also purchase or build cat shelves that attach to windowsills.

Discouraging Your Cat

Keeping tables and counters clean and free of food can make it easier to discourage your cat from visiting these surfaces. In addition, it can help to divide your cat's daily food allowance into several

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small meals a day. Alternatively, you can try giving your cat his or her daily food allowance all at once to be eaten throughout the day; however, if your cat eats all the food at one sitting, this isn't a good option.

Behavior and Training

It's never a good idea to chase your cat away from an unacceptable place or yell at him or her. These punishments often don't work and, instead, teach cats to fear their owners. Alternatives include:

- If you see your cat on a table or counter, quickly squirt your cat in the rear end with water from a squirt bottle or gun, but only when he or she isn't looking. Make sure that the stream of water is strong enough for your cat to feel it through his or her haircoat. If you don't want to use water, you can use a canister of compressed air. Never aim water or air at your cat's face or ears.
- If you don't have a squirt bottle/gun or a compressed air canister handy, simply pick up your cat, say "no" firmly without yelling, and put him or her on the floor.

Environmental "punishers" are a better option because they work when you aren't present; therefore, your cat won't associate you with the punishment or learn to wait until you're not around to go to the unacceptable places. Instead, your cat will learn that it's never safe to go to those places. Commercially available punishers can be used, but here are some ideas for homemade deterrents:

- Cats generally do not like the smell of citrus or disinfectants, so use a cleaner with a citrus odor to keep your tables and counters clean.
- Get several inexpensive plastic placemats and cover one side of each with double-sided tape or Sticky Paws. Then put the placemats sticky-side up on the unacceptable surfaces. Remove the placemats only when you need to use the surfaces, and replace them as soon as you're done. It may take several days for your cat to

decide that sticky tables and counters aren't so great after all. Plain aluminum foil can be used instead of sticky placemats.

- Put a few pennies inside several aluminum cans, and cover the openings with tape. Line up the cans along the edge of the unacceptable surfaces. When your cat tries to jump on the surfaces, the cans are likely to fall and scare him or her away.

For punishment to be effective, it must be consistent. Don't confuse your cat by allowing him or her to be on the table or counter sometimes. Your cat won't understand the difference.

Find a Cat That Doesn't Like Heights

When you're looking for a new cat, you might be able to find one that doesn't like heights. Some domestic shorthaired cats don't like heights, but you'd have to learn this from a previous owner before adopting the cat. Another option is to find a cat of the ragdoll breed, which reportedly dislikes heights.

What Not to Do

- Do not scold or hit your cat for going to unacceptable places. This kind of punishment is highly unlikely to be effective and will teach your cat to fear you.
- Do not shoo or push your cat off counters and tables. A sudden jump or fall could injure your cat.
- Never use an environmental punisher that could physically harm your cat. Environmental punishers should only startle your cat or make a place uncomfortable.
- Never point a water bottle/gun or compressed air canister at your cat's face or ears, and never let your cat see you use these devices on him or her.