

Works Almost Like Magic to Keep Cats Off Counters

When polled, 48% of cat owners said it wasn't 'OK' for their cats to freely roam their kitchen counters. But how do you stop them when you're not there? I have found this formula works almost like magic for reducing the number of cat naps on my counters.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Asked to answer if they believed cats should ever be allowed on their kitchen counters, and what might constitute a pass, more than a thousand veterinarians and 167 cat owners were given a poll to compare results
- Nearly a quarter of the vets, and almost a third of the owners thought it was OK. Those who voted "rarely" from both groups were between 11% and 13%, and the "other" box got similar rankings. The overwhelming majority — 54.5% of veterinarians and 48.1% of cat owners — gave the kitties-on-the-counter question a solid "no"
- The poll takers believed an exception could be made if a cat felt threatened. But 39% of cat owners, who seemed somewhat more permissive than the veterinarians overall, simply weren't bothered by the behavior
- A significant percentage of both groups felt that because there are always times when no one is in the vicinity to keep cats off the counter — at night or when no one is home — being hyper-vigilant about it when someone is around seems futile
- Finally, the question of sanitation was the most significant reason both groups gave for not wanting kitties on the counter. However, cats are arguably the cleanest of pets and some can be easily trained to stay counters

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More than a thousand veterinary professionals and 167 cat owners were asked if cats should be allowed to freely roam the kitchen counters. Without discussing what the kitty might be up to, whether to troll for food or survey the landscape, 21% viewed it favorably, 13% said they "rarely" allow it and 54.5% responded with a resounding "no." There was also an "other" option, which claimed 11.4% of the votes from veterinary professionals.

Cat owners seemed somewhat more permissive than the veterinarians; 28% said their cats' counter surfing was OK with them, 11% said "rarely," and 48.1 gave it a definite negative. The remainder of the survey takers put an X in the "other" box.

Why Would Cats Get a Counter Pass?

In comparison with cat owners in general, 35% of the veterinarian group had slightly different reasons for being OK with cats on the kitchen counter, figuring that kitties feel safer when they're higher than ground level. The owners, at least 39% of them, were simply not bothered by the issue. The upshot is that while vet professionals might not allow cats on the counter as a rule, they're more likely than your run-of-the-mill cat owner to turn a blind eye for this reason.

Of course, a lot of the vets (me included) and cat owners (22% and 17%, respectively) decided it's a moot issue whether or not they're OK with cats jumping up on the kitchen counters, because cats are going to do what they want to do anyway, especially when nobody's around to object. Why bother trying to make them listen to reason? And who knows what your cat does when he's home alone? Write-ins on the poll confirmed that at the end of the day, that's the basic rationale for both groups; in essence, "What're you gonna do?"



Dr. Becker's cat Squishy, after jumping from the counter to the top of the refrigerator

Is There Ever a Reason for Cats To Be on the Counter?

The general consensus for just over a quarter of each group was that it's acceptable if kitties jump up on the kitchen counter if they're using it as a spontaneous getaway from a perceived threat. Coming in a close second on the survey was that both owners and veterinarians make an effort at keeping counters off limits to their frisky felines during meal preparation, but otherwise relax the boundaries.

Surprisingly, only 2% of the vet professionals and 5% of the kitty owners said they tried to be more diligent about keeping their pets off the counter in the presence of guests. The "other" option gleaned the most significant response: 46% of the veterinary professionals and 36% of cat owners said it had more to do with whether or not somebody was around to enforce the "no counter" rule, and several decided all the options might work for them at some point, depending on the circumstances.

Why Discourage Counter Hopping?

It's no surprise, perhaps, that the overwhelming reason both groups disapprove of cats roaming kitchen counters has to do with hygiene issues.

Another thing cat owners will tell you is that felines keep themselves cleaner than canines, a fact that most dog owners won't argue with. Perhaps the real issue here is that dogs and cats are different. Dogs seldom feel the need to jump up on the kitchen counter. But if you see your cat there, you have to ask yourself where your cat's paws have been. Some

people reason that after using the litter box a kitty's paws can't be sanitary, but cats give themselves a bath on the average of half their waking hours.¹ Some cats actually bathe too often.

Another problem with cats' counter surfing is claw marks on the cupboard doors and drawers. The answer to that is: never declaw your cat, but find new places in your house for her to jump to elevate her perspective.

Paws and Reflect: Kitchen Counter Alternatives

If you have other pets in your home, it's possible the cat might need an alternate perch or two that is high enough to keep her from scrambling onto the kitchen counter whenever the pups amble her way. A small table near a window she likes, a special basket with her own blanket in a favorite area of the house, or a jungle gym for cats complete with tunnels, scratching surfaces and catnip toys — these will all go a long way toward encouraging her to opt for these as go-to places when she needs to feel safe, rather than heading for the kitchen counter.

I've been able to reduce the amount of cat naps occurring on my kitchen counters by doing two things: moving a higher cat tree with lots of napping spots close to the counters, and using the pure essential oils of lemon and tangerine (diluted with vinegar water), misted on my countertops several times a day. Unlike me, cats hate the smell of citrus.

Finally, while a few might argue this point, some cats can be trained. They're able to learn how to take walks wearing a harness attached to a leash — they can even be trained to use a toilet — so they can certainly learn to stay off the kitchen counter. If Fluffy gets a little testy or bossy, you can use gentle persuasion to get her to see things your way; food as an incentive is one. Gentleness and an ability to read her mood are important. If you feel you need help with a cat who won't take no for an answer, your veterinarian can be called on for advice.

Sources and References

[VetStreet March 19, 2014](#)

¹ [Petfinder Why Do Cats Lick Themselves?](#)
