

## SunShine Animal Hospital Client Education Series

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### **YOUR CATS NEED TO KNEAD !**

You're reading a newspaper when suddenly your cat jumps onto your lap, forcing her way between you and the current events. She's purring and begins to knead your lap, circling around and finding a perfect position to curl into. She is completely oblivious to your desires as she focuses on the push and pull of her front paws. She's your cat, and she has a need to knead.



#### **Why Cats Knead**

The kneading behavior begins early in life, while kittens are nursing. As kittens knead their mother's mammary glands, oxytocin is released, causing milk to flow. Animal experts believe other reasons cats knead might include:

- To show affection
- To mark territory: Cats have scent glands between their toes on their front paws
- Separated from mother too early
- Normal behavior of a female cat going into heat

Because kneading represents a period of comfort and safety for kittens as they snuggle up with their mothers and siblings during nursing, cats continue this behavior to display affection toward others later in life. It also serves as a self-comforting behavior, bringing a feeling of contentment for adult cats. Similar to a child who sucks his thumb long after his mother has stopped nursing, a cat's kneading helps him to feel comfortable and bonded to you. It's his way of relaxing with you.

Cats also leave a scent from special interdigital scent glands when they knead. That kneading helps to mark an area as safe. Cats have high-level olfactory senses, and like a feline aromatherapy, the cat is working to make your lap smell familiar and relaxing.

Kittens who are weaned from their mothers too early (prior to 10 weeks of age) are more likely to display kneading behavior as adults.

It has been documented that female cats knead when they are going into heat. There is a difference between comfort kneading and the kneading performed while seeking a mate.