

Behavior FAQ: Eating Wool, Plastic and Other Nonfood Items

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Eating nonfood items could indicate a medical problem, so it is important to consult with your veterinarian as a first step in addressing the problem.

Behaviorists don't understand why some animals will eat nonfood items and others do not. The technical term for this behavior is pica—eating things that aren't food. Wool, wood items and plastic products are often favorite targets for cats. These behaviors seem to be more common in Siamese cats and related breeds. Some items your pet ingests can create life-threatening intestinal blockages, so your pet's life may depend on stopping this behavior.

Pet-proof your house, if possible, so your cat can't get hold of the things he likes to chew and eat. If you can't keep him away from the items, use products to make them taste bad or harmless "booby traps" to keep pets away. Find other things to keep your cat occupied so she isn't looking for things to chew on.

If these suggestions don't work, and especially if the pica is causing life-threatening blockages, consult with your veterinarian and/or an experienced and knowledgeable behavior consultant. Through a combination of environmental management, medications prescribed by your veterinarian and appropriate use of aversive consequences, it may be possible to stop the behavior.

FIND A BEHAVIOR CONSULTANT TO HELP

Many problems are easily corrected through modification training, particularly if problems are addressed early. Find an animal behavior consultant in your area through one of the following Web sites: [American College of Veterinary Behaviorists](http://www.acvb.org), [International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants](http://www.internationalassociationofanimalbehaviorconsultants.com) or [Animal Behavior Society](http://www.animalbehavioristsociety.com). Learn more by reading "Guidelines for Choosing a Trainer or Behavior Consultant."