

My roommate's cat is always jumping up on the kitchen counter. Although it might not bother her, I don't care for it. Is there a way to teach a cat not to do this? Maybe we can try to work on it together.

Cats are generally very clean animals, but they do step in their litter box and other dirty areas so it probably isn't very sanitary to have him walk around on the same surface that you use for food preparation. There are several diseases and parasites that can be spread from cats to humans, particularly if a person's immune system is weak.

There could be a variety of reasons why a cat likes to be on the kitchen counter, so the first step is to try to eliminate the possible attraction. Some cats are looking for food and jump up on the counter to look for and eat crumbs or pieces of food that were left behind. Make a point of wiping off the counters and cleaning out the sink after you have had a meal and washed the dishes. Other cats jump on the counter to get a higher view of the room, to be closer to you, or because they are fearful of a threat at ground level (maybe the family dog or another cat). Try keeping a bar stool or tall cat tree near the kitchen counter so he can perch there instead to safely watch what is going on in the room.

At the same time that you are trying to reduce his reasons for jumping up in the first place, make the counter less attractive to him. Place something on the counter that won't feel good under his feet. Try strips of aluminum foil or double-sided tape affixed to placemats that you can move when you need to use the area. If these deterrents don't work, there are alarms available that are triggered by vibration. The cat jumps on the counter and the alarm sprays a jet of forced air in his direction or sets off a loud noise.

Whenever you do catch the cat jumping up to the stool or cat tree, praise him and offer a tasty treat as positive reinforcement. Throughout the day lift him up to the preferred spot and praise him once he sits there. Clicker training him to jump on the stool instead of the counter can be effective also. The unwanted behavior will not be easy to change, but if you and your roommate are consistent there is hope for a cat-free kitchen counter.

Francine K. Rattner, V.M.D.

South Arundel Veterinary Hospital