

"WOOL-EATING" BY SIAMESE CATS

Q.: What is the cause of and the treatment for "wool-eating" by Siamese cats?—S, Canada.

A.: It is difficult to be concise in answer to such a question, but the following factors should be considered. (1) Cats are extremely "oral"—they may suckle from the mother even at 6 months of age and older. (2) When being petted, adult cats will frequently begin to salivate, push rhythmically with the forefeet and "root" beneath the arm of the owner. Human odors and reinforcement by petting may bring on such regressive or infantile behavior in adult cats. (3) "Wool-eating" may be seen in cats that indulge in infantile behavior with the owner and they delight in sucking and chewing clothing that the owner may leave lying around. This is certainly a "vice" and such compulsive oral behavior may reduce anxiety due to conflict or loneliness, as reported in the dog. (Fox, M. W.: Psychogenic polyphagia (compulsive eating) in a dog. *Vet Rec* 74: 1023-1024, 1962.) (4) String-, wool-, or straw-eating in the cat is complicated by the anatomic arrangement of the stiff dorsal papillae on the tongue. These backwardly projecting "rasps" make it difficult to dislodge these materials, so the cat is obliged to continue ingesting great lengths of wool or string until all is gone.—M. W. Fox, MRCVS, Galesburg State Research Hospital, Galesburg, Illinois.

COMMENT: Some veterinarians interpret this behavior as a sucking reflex and attempt to "wean" the cat by providing a nursing bottle and milk for a period. The milk is gradually diluted and then replaced with water. Some success is claimed for such management of "wool-eaters."—E. J. Catcott, DVM, PhD.