



## “How Do I Keep My Cat Off the Counter??”

This question comes up regularly among new cat owners, for very understandable reasons. Cats like elevated places, and in many houses, tables and counters are the surfaces highest from the floor. In addition, this behavior (often called “counter cruising”) is reinforced, usually if the cat finds food. The following guidelines can help you and your cat live more peacefully:

1. **Pick your battles.** While the following tips may reduce your cat’s “cruising” habit, they may or may not eliminate it. This is not to say one *can’t* do anything about it; it is simply that such behavior is very common in cats and one that some owners simply decide to live with. They make a point to carefully clean their countertops before preparing food and clear the surfaces promptly to avoid the cat eating things he shouldn’t.
2. **Keep the counter clear at all times.** If there is food left out, the cat will continue to go there. Clean all areas promptly, including the sink: many cats enjoy small food portions left there, particularly in the drain.
3. **Make the counter surface unrewarding for the cat.** Pam Johnson-Bennett, author of *Think Like A Cat*, recommends purchasing several cheap plastic placemats and covering one side of them with double-sided tape. (You can also use a double-sided product called Sticky Paws, which won’t leave a residue when removed.) Place the placemats all over the counter when it is not in use and remove them only when preparing food. Many cats don’t like sticky surfaces, so the idea is for the cat to jump up, feel a painless but uncomfortable sensation, then jump down. Leaving the mats on the counter at all times when not in use will keep the cat from returning. When weeks have passed without signs of the cat on the counters, remove one placemat at a time (one per day, for ex.) until the counter is clear. If the cat’s cruising habit returns, put the mats back. You can also sprinkle cayenne pepper on the mats, or smear them with a small portion of Vicks’ Vapor Rub (watch to be sure the cat doesn’t lick it, as ingesting it could be harmful).
4. **Don’t punish.** Some people use remote punishers like squirt guns or shake-cans full of pennies, but we don’t recommend them for the following reasons. One, cats don’t generally respond well to punishment: they either become frightened, or simply don’t make the connection that their behavior caused it to happen. Two, if you have more than one cat, you might startle a cat who is doing an appropriate activity, such as using his litter box. Third, physical or verbal punishment (swatting, yelling, etc.) most often causes stress to cats or provokes aggression, opening the door to problems such as biting or litter box rejection.
5. **Give the cat appropriate activities to do.** Provide your cat a tall condo for climbing, and reward her with treats for perching in the top. Buy a food-dispensing toy from a pet supply store and let your cat bang it around on the floor, which is where you’d like her to be! Since animals repeat what benefits them, make doing the right behavior rewarding for your cat.

Buffalo ★ Coon Rapids ★ Golden Valley ★ St. Paul ★ Woodbury

Telephone **763 522 4325**  
[www.animalhumanesociety.org](http://www.animalhumanesociety.org)



6. **Confine the cat during mealtime or meal preparation.** If your cat simply won't stay off the counters while you're working with food, confine her safely in a cat-proofed room with bedding, toys, water and at least one litter box. Let her out as soon as you are finished.
7. **Play with your cat at least once a day.** This gives your cat an appropriate way to earn attention and burn excess energy.

Remember, above all, that if your cat's environment is not managed and she is rewarded (see above) for jumping on the counter, the behavior will continue. Think not just about *stopping* the behavior, but how to create the *right* behavior in your furry friend.