

# The Cat Behaviour Decoder

Why she knocked the mug off the table, and the other mysteries, solved — with the real biological and behavioral explanation behind each one, and the popular claims that don't hold up flagged plainly.



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## Knocking Things Off Tables

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It is not spite. VCA Animal Hospitals is direct about this: cats knocking objects off shelves and tables are "exercising their inborn need to hunt by finding 'prey' wherever they can, including on your shelves and tables."<sup>1</sup> The behavior draws on the same predatory sequence cats use on real prey — stalk, pounce, bite — just redirected at a pen that happens to roll invitingly.<sup>2</sup>

### DOCTOR AGATHA'S NOTE

There is a second, less flattering mechanism at work. Your cat has learned that knocking something over reliably produces a reaction from you — a look up from your phone counts. That's a second reinforcement loop stacked on top of the hunting instinct, and it is entirely your fault.

### What Actually Helps

VCA's guidance for redirecting predatory play applies directly here: give the behavior a legitimate outlet. Toys that roll, and objects that can genuinely be stalked, chased, and pounced on, satisfy the same drive your desk ornaments are currently absorbing.<sup>2</sup>

In practice, that means treating play as a scheduled need rather than an occasional bonus. A cat whose predatory drive gets a real daily outlet — a wand toy, a ball that rolls unpredictably, even a treat puzzle that requires some "hunting" — has measurably less motivation to manufacture prey out of your belongings. Rotating which toys are available also matters more than owners expect; a toy left out permanently stops registering as interesting "prey" fairly quickly.