

# How Does Cat Hair Become Matted Fur?

By: Dr. Shelby Neely, DVM

## The Basics of Cat Hair

Cat hair consists of 1 to 3 types of hair, plus the distinctive whiskers, which are also hairs. A brief review:



- **Guard hairs**, also known as primary hairs, are the longer stiffer hairs that usually determine the basic color of your cat.
- **Undercoat**, also known as secondary hairs, are the fluffier softer hair that keeps the cat warm. It's also known as down. This is the layer that is shed the most and will most easily mat. This is the layer of hair that is the source of cat hairballs because they ingest this as they groom themselves.
- **Awn** are the finer hairs that usually form the basic coat of the cat.
- And then, of course, there are the whiskers.

## Differences in Cat Hair

The ratio of primary to secondary hairs differs according to the age and breed of a cat. Newborn kittens do not have primary hairs. That's why they feel so soft and have such short haircoats.

However, by the time kittens are **six months of age**, they usually have a good amount of primary hairs. You will then find that their coats are longer and more coarse.

There are many **variations amongst different breeds regarding texture, color and exact length** of the cat hair coat. All of these differences in cat hair are largely the result of the ratio between primary to secondary hairs and the texture of the individual hairs.

## Cat Fur Problems: Cats Shedding

There is no such thing as a cat that doesn't shed. All hair dies and is then shed and replaced by new hair. The extent and speed at which cats shedding occurs is determined by factors such as nutrition, allergies, sex of the cat, breed, hormones, the temperature outside, the amount of sunlight your cat gets, age, etc.

From breed to breed and even within a particular breed, **each individual cat will shed and grow new hair at different rates.**

**Indoor cats tend to shed continuously** due to the artificial environment which has heat and light all the time.

**Outdoor cats**, especially those that live outdoors all the time, tend to shed just during major seasonal changes, usually **spring and fall** and for just a few weeks at that time. These cats usually have more

secondary hairs or undercoat in the fall for warmth. In the spring, they start losing the undercoat and replacing it with more of the primary hairs.

Therefore, during different seasons, the ratio of primary and secondary hair changes. This results in changes in the appearance and texture of hair, but **the number of hair follicles and actual hairs never changes**. You and your cat were born with all of the hair follicles, and therefore the number of hairs, you are ever going to have.

In our article about cat hairballs, we talked about the importance of removing the undercoat because it is the layer of hair that is shed the most and is therefore the source of most of the hair ingested as your cat is grooming.

## Matted Fur

The other problem with the loose undercoat is that it is **the cat hair that will most easily mat**. Mats begin to form because the loose hairs of the undercoat become tangled with the guard hairs. As more and more hair gets trapped, the fur mat gets larger.

More cat hair becomes matted fur and more hair gets trapped, so the fur mat continues to enlarge almost without limits. It is not uncommon to see cats that haven't been groomed in a long time and have mats **covering their entire bodies**. In fact, I've seen many cats with completely matted fur coats that came off in one piece as we shaved the cat.



Of particular concern are **cat mats that extend under the tail onto the back legs**. Feces and urine can be trapped in a cat mat located in this area. When this happens, your cat not only smells bad, but the unhealthy environment can lead to skin infections. We've also even seen cats where the anus and urethra were partially obstructed by matted fur, leading to great discomfort for the cat, an inability or unwillingness to use the litter box, urinary tract infections, constipation, and more.

I have read articles where others say that short haired cats cannot get mats, only long haired cats, and that is **absolutely not true**. Long haired cats may develop matted fur more readily, but I have seen a number of short haired cats that are quite matted. In fact, until I started to use the FURminator<sup>®</sup> on all of my own cats, I had a short haired cat that developed mats every spring for 13 years. Mats in short haired cats, or in any cat for that matter, can be due to the hair type and texture, as well as obesity, humidity, season, and possibly systemic diseases.

In summary, **mats are uncomfortable, even downright painful** for your cat. Mats also prevent your cat's skin from remaining healthy. Dead hair that would otherwise be shed is trapped and, during that process, dirt and debris can build up. Moisture can be trapped from urine and feces. All of this creates an environment that can be inviting to lice, fleas or even maggots. This also, of course, creates an environment that is very **susceptible to infection, inflammation, and red, irritated, raw, and painful skin**.

## Preventing Matted Fur



Fortunately, **matted fur can be prevented** and can actually be prevented rather easily. There is only one way to prevent mats and that is by **practicing cat grooming at home**. Ideally, brushing should be performed daily in order to prevent mats and hairballs.

There are hundreds of different pet grooming supplies, cat grooming combs, and cat brushes on the market for grooming a cat. I have tried many of these kitty grooming tools over the years, and I can honestly say that **none hold a candle to the FURminator**.

I have not been as excited over a new product since I bought the first iPhone 4 years ago! For me, the iPhone was really life-changing and the FURminator has also been **life-changing for me AND my cats**.

Crazy as it sounds, the FURminator is FUN to use and RELAXING to use, but more importantly, it does a better job of grooming pets than any of the other pet grooming products I have ever used. It's perfect for **preventing hairballs** and perfect for **preventing matted fur**. It is

also very handy for removing mats if they are not too large. If mats are not removed early, there comes a point where nothing will remove them other than shaving.