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## The Dreaded M.D.

Fri, 2013-01-04 18:10 — Robin Olson

### ***“Is that kitten missing some of his fur?”***

I looked over at Barney. He was playing with a toy held by a little girl who was taking part in our [Kitties for Kids](#) <sup>[1]</sup> program. **Barney was oblivious to the fact that the fur on his side looked like it had been wiped away.** He wasn't completely bald and with his white and orange coat, it was tough to see how much he was missing at a glance.



©2013 Robin A.F. Olson. Barney's naked patch.

**I took a closer look and it was clear that Barney was licking off his fur, not just on one side, but on both.**

Shit.

**I'd noticed the foster cats have been itchy for a few weeks or more, but not so much that it caused alarms to go off.** They've been checked a few times for fleas, but we find nothing, not even flea dirt. Last year was a VERY bad year for fleas so it wouldn't be surprising that there were some in the foster room.



©2013 Robin A.F. Olson. Dr. Larry takes a look.

### **What to do?**

I've had a lot of experience with [Miliary Dermatitis](#) <sup>[2]</sup>. My cat [Gracie](#) <sup>[3]</sup> suffers from it. **M.D. is basically “I don't know that**

**the heck it is” but it’s some sort of skin issue. Many times it’s related to a stress reaction, food or a mite or flea bite.** In Gracie’s case, after YEARS of doing tests, seeing specialists, trial and error, only homeopathy worked to reduce the problem and steroids resolved it for a few weeks. **The problem with steroids is-it will end up killing Gracie over time so for me, giving her more wasn’t acceptable.**



©2013 Robin A.F. Olson. Fred seems fine.

Gracie is covered with scabs. **She stopped “barbering” (chewing) her coat and no longer has bloody lesions, but her fur is not plush and her skin feels terrible.** I’m looking into acupuncture, but other than that I feel as though I’ve tried it all.

I look at Barney and think about the MANY things that could be causing him to lick off his fur. I knew a trip to see Dr. Larry would probably be a waste of time, but I had to start there.

Dr. Larry agreed with me that it was most likely M.D. and made some suggestions. One startled me, but also inspired me. **He said to let Barney be an indoor/outdoor cat. That the stimulation of being outside reduced the need to over-groom because the cat was having so much FUN!**



©2013 Robin A.F. Olson. Caught in the act.

### **What? I can’t let my cats outside!**

**Then I realized I have NOT been spending enough time with the kittens. Playtime is for five minutes here and five minutes there.** I’ve been too busy to do more than that. I figured since I hear them running around they must be playing. There are five cats in the foster room after all.

I also thought about the Kitties for Kids program. **Was the stress of meeting all these strangers getting to Barney?** Thing is, he is the FIRST cat to go over to a new person and say hi! He’s very social. If he was upset by the visitors wouldn’t he be hiding instead of playing?



©2013 Robin A.F. Olson. *What the?!?!...the kittens are nursing on Willow!*

### **What about diet?**

Yes, that could be a factor. **Since ALL the foster cats are scratching, something is making them itchy.** The donations of food we've gotten lately is a mixed bag of canned, grain-free food. They get fed what I have on hand, not something consistent AND I've fed them a tuna based food recently for the first time. Did that set them off? Gracie seems to react to having fish.

### **The more I learn about cats, the more I sense that playtime is the key to more than we understand.**

It reduces stress, stretches the muscles and the mind, it helps them have an outlet for their prey drive. **If we simply shake a toy at them once in awhile, it's just NOT enough. Their mind needs to be engaged** if they stay indoors. I've seen Jackson get very nasty with the other cats when he's clearly bored.



©2012 Robin A.F. Olson. *Liftoff during one of our Kitties for Kids visits.*

Normally, what you do is change ONE thing and see if it works. If that doesn't work, then go on to the next thing. **Because Barney is so young and should NOT be having this issue, I'm going to do a few things and hope that one of them is the answer.**

I'll start with an application of Revolution® [4]. I like it better than some other flea treatments and it does affect mites and internal parasites, too. I realize it could make things worse, but Barney's skin is fine. There are no open lesions. He does NOT have ringworm.



©2012 Robin A.F. Olson. Coco shows how it's done.

I've already started ramping up playtime. **I got a new [Da Bird](#) <sup>[5]</sup> donated to us. It REALLY tires the cats out as long as I don't let the cats catch the toy. If so, they destroy it in about 2 seconds.** What I do is basically make them go nuts for at least 15 minutes. After the cats slow down or start to lay down instead of chase the toy, I start up with ANOTHER toy. I use a [Cat Dancer](#) and [Rainbow CatCharmer](#) <sup>[6]</sup> or a laser pointer or both. I throw balls around, mouse toys, [Kong® Cat Kickaroos](#) <sup>[7]</sup>. I want to see the cats get to the point of just about falling over they're so tired. I'll even open up my old iPad and play [Game for Cats](#) <sup>[8]</sup> for them to further stimulate their minds. If I see Barney lick at himself I distract him with more playtime.

Lastly I've simplified their diet. Ideally I would feed them raw but that's not in the budget. I'm cutting out fish and only giving them chicken/turkey. It's very high quality grain-free canned food and I'm feeding them more often so they're less stressed when they get their food. I noticed they were gulping at their meal the other day so clearly they need more to eat and more often.



©2013 Robin A.F. Olson. Entertained by his Kong Cat Kickaroo.

The hope is that one or more of these things will work and Barney will stop licking off his fur. The fear is that he won't and this will be a chronic problem for him. I'm also thinking about letting him run the whole house instead of just the foster room. The extra space might do him good.

Last night I let him out for a few minutes and he was terrified, so for now I'll go more slowly and only open up smaller areas at a time.



©2013 Robin A.F. Olson. Poor sweetie.

What is ailing Barney and making the others itchy? Is it dry skin or is Kitties for Kids going to have to be shelved? I can't say right now. All I know is that I need to find an answer fast before Barney makes this into an OCD-like reaction that will require heavy-duty meds for years to come.

**In my heart I feel like the key to keeping Barney healthy is more playtime, not just for him, but for ALL of our cats.**

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[Kitten Associates](#) <sup>[26]</sup>

[Kitties for Kids](#) <sup>[27]</sup>

## **Comments**

Fri, 2013-01-04 18:22 — Heather (not verified)

### **[Can't hurt](#)** <sup>[28]</sup>

I'm by no means a cat expert, but play is not going to hurt the kittens. And just like toddlers - is there really such a thing as "too much play"?

Fri, 2013-01-04 19:06 — [Stephanie Newma... \(not verified\)](#) <sup>[29]</sup>

### **[Whatever works](#)** <sup>[30]</sup>

I've seen cats who like their fur off much like Barney and his friends, but none of my cats have ever done that. It must be so frustrating to have a non-specific diagnosis. I gave it some thought after I wrote a comment on your post about this on Facebook last night, and my thoughts are like yours: stress! Cats can sense when we're stressed out. My youngest broke out in the worst acne I've ever seen in November 2011 when one of my dearest friends was dying from cancer. She knew I was devastated. The stress you feel, as well as everybody in your community, must be felt by the kitties. With their schedule being off, that's another thing to throw any kitty off. Please keep me posted on how things go.

Fri, 2013-01-04 20:20 — Dorothy (not verified)

### **[Great timing](#)** <sup>[31]</sup>

Sometimes you read something just when you need too. Today, just a bit more than a year since the last time, our cat Hitch scooted out the door as I was going out to talk to the mail carrier. Hitch has been an inside cat since he "hitchhiked" his way to us in 2008. In the beginning he wanted out a lot but as time went on, and he was rescued by the fire dept for the second time, he seemed content staying in. Normally I play with our four cats at least 30 minutes in the morning and again in the evening. Lately I've been slacking off. It's crowded with the holiday decorations and swinging the favorite da bird isn't as much fun. So tomorrow the decorations come down and we get back to our normal schedule. Hopefully, Hitch will be amused and tired enough to be happy in the house.

Thanks for a perfectly timed post. I hope Barney gets better quickly and that this post helps lots of cats live fuller lives.

Sat, 2013-01-05 08:59 — [Kathy \(not verified\)](#) <sup>[32]</sup>

### **Problem-solving with Barney** <sup>[33]</sup>

Thanks for the detailed post. I'm finding that the info that you're sharing is helping me to re-examine what's going on in my own house (said the woman who's lived with cats all of her life but mostly blogs about dogs). I've liked the holistic path and have always blended it with the western approaches to health care that I'm comfortable with. With my most recent cat adoption: last June we adopted a 4 month old, male cat from our local humane society, I went looking for a holistic food because of some of the health issues I was having with him. Not sure if this will help you out, but here's the link to a great food that I can buy from a local pet store - <http://www.weruva.com/> <sup>[34]</sup> - There are several types with a varying price point. (Feeding raw doesn't completely work for me either. ) My cats (2) are inside cats - and the newest one has a really strong play drive - it's like having another dog in the house.

Whenever I've had to problem solve, I've done what you're doing which is to change one thing, wait to see what happens and then decide what should come after that. I'm curious too, about how you and Barney work out his "issues" and look forward to hearing about that.

Sun, 2013-01-06 05:40 — Michele (not verified)

### **Hope that this improves for** <sup>[35]</sup>

Hope that this improves for you. It may be stress they are feeling from everyone else.

I know you said that it is not ringworm. Have you ever had any with ringworm? I am battling it right now and I am curious what you have done to eradicate it?

Sun, 2013-01-06 14:59 — [jmuwj \(not verified\)](#)

### **RE: BARNEY** <sup>[36]</sup>

It sounds like all of your ideas have merit, Robin; if I were in your place, I'd integrate them all into Barney's (and everyone else's) daily routine. The stress issue is probably the most important of all; cats being very sensitive and having acute hearing would probably not do well with groups of noisy, overactive kids. Barney in particular may be wanting refuge from this, so maybe he would do better not participating in the program.

The calico beauty in our family has started overgrooming with no changes in diet or other stimuli; what I think is happening is that she misses our eldest, whom we lost in August, deeply; this has translated into overgrooming, which I hope will clear up in time. For now, I am giving her extra one-on-one love and attention and reassuring her.

Some time back, I adopted a street cat who was in poor shape, very thin and with skin issues; she thrived and filled out beautifully once in good care, but never lost her overgrooming tendency. Having Siamese genes might have had a lot to do with it, as a lot of Siamese are high-strung.

All the best to Barney and everyone!

Mon, 2013-01-07 00:10 — [Catnonymouse \(not verified\)](#)

### **Do you have a humidifier** <sup>[37]</sup>

Do you have a humidifier attached to the furnace? If not, you may want to consider running one in their room since they are ALL itchy.

Mon, 2013-01-07 14:03 — [Catnonymouse \(not verified\)](#)

### **Check the environment** <sup>[38]</sup>

Two of my cats had this issue. It was caused by an allergic reaction to a new "cat play house" that was not washable and made of fabric. Something in the finish of the fabric made them extremely itchy! Once I threw it out, no more issues and no need for antihistamines.

Two others had a problem last year and it was either the fabric softener or detergent in their blankets, and in my bedding. I switched to the no color/fragrance sensitive skin detergent and swore off dryer sheets and liquid fabric softener, even on my clothes. It worked! This was after changing diet, going to the vet, and spending A LOT of money!

Also, if you smoke in the house, please don't! The toxins end up on their fur and they ingest it when they bathe. You can end up with allergic reactions and even cancers such as squamous cell carcinoma.

I hope it's as simple as looking at their environment. I don't think they should be indoor/outdoor cats; that is not safe. What kind of vet suggests something like that?! I agree that Revolution is the best/safest treatment on the market for cats.

Good luck!!!

Fri, 2013-01-11 11:37 — Lynne Allison (not verified)

## **Itching/Overgrooming** [39]

I hope you can find a way to deal with this problem, Robin. I think you may well be on the right track about boredom and stress. Our blackie Inxs has had intermittent problems with all the above. First, he is small and tends to be the one the others pick on when they are upset. Second, Inxs desperately wants to be an outdoor cat! I take them out for supervised play in the warm months and he's the first out the door and the last "caught." (I live on an acreage.) Left up to him, he'll only come in when he gets hungry and in spite of supervision he frequently hauls in a mouse or other small prey. He absolutely loves the life but there's no way to make it safe for him full-time. He scratches his ears till they bleed when he's going through a bad patch, but hasn't done much of it since my oldest male (a bit of a bully) passed away. My spouse is a vet and all the cats have been thoroughly checked over for fleas, mites and etc. In short, I think each animal is different, and stress and emotional upheaval can play a large part in this kind of thing, just as a stressed child can develop nervous tics. My best guess for sweet Barney is that the emotional devastation following your town's tragedy has affected him. I'm guessing he's very sensitive to tension in his caregivers and any other people around him. Best of luck and much love to you and all the kitties!

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Robin @ [Google+](#)

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### **Links**

- [1] <http://kittenassociates.org/content/come-visit>
- [2] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miliary\\_dermatitis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miliary_dermatitis)
- [3] <http://www.coveredincathair.com/content/gracie-update>
- [4] [https://animalhealth.pfizer.com/sites/pahweb/us/en/products/Pages/Revolution\\_Cat.aspx](https://animalhealth.pfizer.com/sites/pahweb/us/en/products/Pages/Revolution_Cat.aspx)
- [5] <http://www.go-cat.com/>
- [6] <http://www.catdancer.com/products.htm>
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