



What Do a Cat's Whiskers Do?

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A cat's whiskers are known as "specialized sensory hairs." Their extreme sensitivity can register very small changes in air pressure, enabling the kitty to avoid objects while moving around in the dark.

Whiskers are grouped in three specific locations on the cat's head. The supercilary whiskers are positioned above the eyes, the genal whiskers to the rear of the cat's cheek area, and the mystacial whiskers (which are the longest and most prominent) are carried either side of the cat's muzzle.

The mystacial whiskers are primarily used as an alternative sensing device when the eyes are no longer effective (i.e. in the dark). It's now thought that there's a link between visual and other sensory input in the cat. Indeed, research indicates a degree of parallel processing takes place within the cat's brain. This can be demonstrated by simply touching the end of the whiskers—the automatic response is for the cat to blink.

Whiskers are also used as a sort of magic sensing rod, enabling the feline to test its ability to fit through small places and get around obstacles.

Cats are able to change the position of their whiskers depending on what they are doing. At rest the whiskers are

elongated at 90 percent to the head; when walking they are tilted forward to aid their sensing ability. Whiskers can also indicate mood. A cat walking with whiskers pointed only slightly forward and down is feeling attentive, yet calm.

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