

Overstimulation in Cats

It can be confusing when a cat goes from seemingly friendly to biting and scratching. While over stimulation isn't aggression, their response may appear aggressive. This behavior is common among cats and is easy to manage. A cat who seemingly bites "out of the blue" while being pet may do this because of over petting or built up frustration. Stress or frustration is created from either the lack of interaction or from overexposure to something that is unattainable, like a bird at the window.

All cats have the ability to become overstimulated but vary in their reaction based on frustration level and or how much they tolerate being pet or held. Some cats will only react by twitching their tails, while others will escalate into a bite. All reactions though, especially a bite, is the cat's signal that they have had enough petting. Owners must become aware of their cats body postures and cease petting or stop any other kind of interaction before the bite occurs.

Signals owners should be aware of:

- Restlessness
- Cat's tail beginning to twitch
- Cat's ears turning back or flicking back and forth
- Cat's skin rippling when you pet them
- The cat turning or moving their head toward your hand

What to do:

Before your cat shows any of the behaviors described above, offer a tasty treat while lightly petting them. Each time you work with your cat, try to pet them for slightly longer periods of time. Petting will then be associated with more pleasant things and may help them enjoy being pet for longer periods of times. Daily playtime can also help with overstimulation.

What not to do:

Any kind of physical punishment will make the problem worse, as it makes the cat more likely to bite either because they are fearful or because petting becomes even more unpleasant.

