



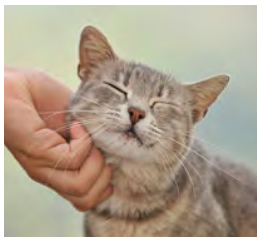
PAWS[®] CHICAGO

PETTING INDUCED AGGRESSION

CONGRATULATIONS ON ADOPTING YOUR NEW FAMILY MEMBER!

Petting-induced aggression, or overstimulation, commonly occurs when a seemingly peaceful cat bites or scratches while being pet. Although it may appear as if the bite comes out of nowhere and is unprovoked, many cats display signs they are approaching their comfort threshold prior to biting. Overstimulated cats are not mean or angry, just overwhelmed. With the behavior modification tips below, you can help ensure your newest family member is always at ease.

Managing Overstimulation



When petting your cat, stick to safe spots where most cats enjoy being touched: the top of the head, sides of the face, underside of the chin, and no farther down than the back of the neck. Common areas to avoid include the cat's belly, legs, and paws.



Keep your petting sessions short. After about 1-3 seconds of petting, take a break to assess your cat's body language. If you observe any signs of overstimulation, cease the interaction, and give the cat space. If the cat appears relaxed and calm, continue on for another 1-3 seconds and repeat the above process.

Common Signs of Impending Overstimulation

- Purring stops
- Tail lashing or thumping
- Skin twitching or appearing to ripple
- Shifting body position, tensed muscles, or withdrawing from touch
- Ears are lowered and resemble airplane wings or begin rotating backwards against the head
- Dilated pupils
- Growling, hissing
- Hard, fixed stares directed at the person's hand or arm

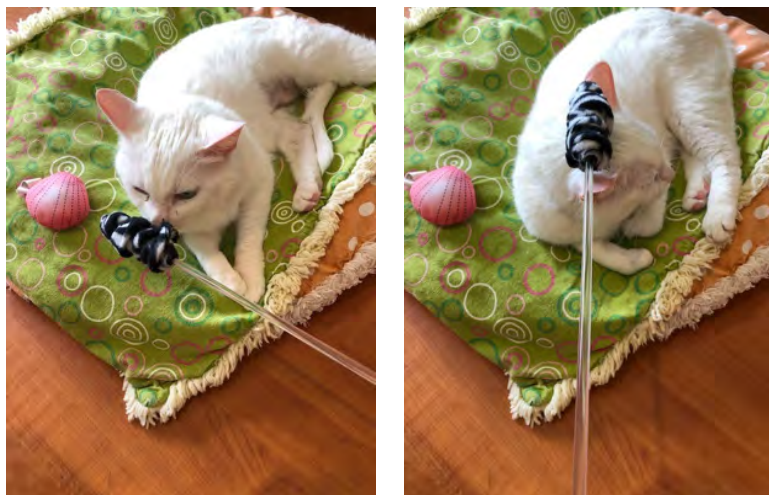


If you observe any of these signals while petting a cat, immediately refrain from touching the cat and give him a break.

My Cat Doesn't Show Any Signs of Overstimulation Before Nipping. What Now?

Although many cats show signs of impending overstimulation, some give signs that are extremely subtle. If your cat's signs of overstimulation are difficult to determine, use a tool to help you define your cat's boundaries safely.

Using a wand/teaser toy, wrap the attachment around one end of the toy's handle. Present the toy to your cat, and use the soft end to lightly pet different parts of her body. If your cat withdraws, hisses, bites, or displays any of the other signs of overstimulation, avoid petting these areas.



A wand/teaser toy can be used to gauge your cat's sensitivity to touch. Gently pet the cat with the soft end of the toy as you would with your hand.

Cat owners can utilize a wand/teaser toy to desensitize their cat to touch while using food rewards to counter condition the cat's response.

If you are having difficulties managing your cat's petting-induced aggression, please contact us at adoptions@pawschicago.org or emayes@pawschicago.org. We can direct you to someone who can help.