



## CAT OVERSTIMULATION

### KNOW THE SIGNS OF OVERSTIMULATION

Most cats give signals that they are becoming overstimulated. The signals may be subtle or obvious, depending on the cat. Some warning signs that a cat may not want to continue interacting are:

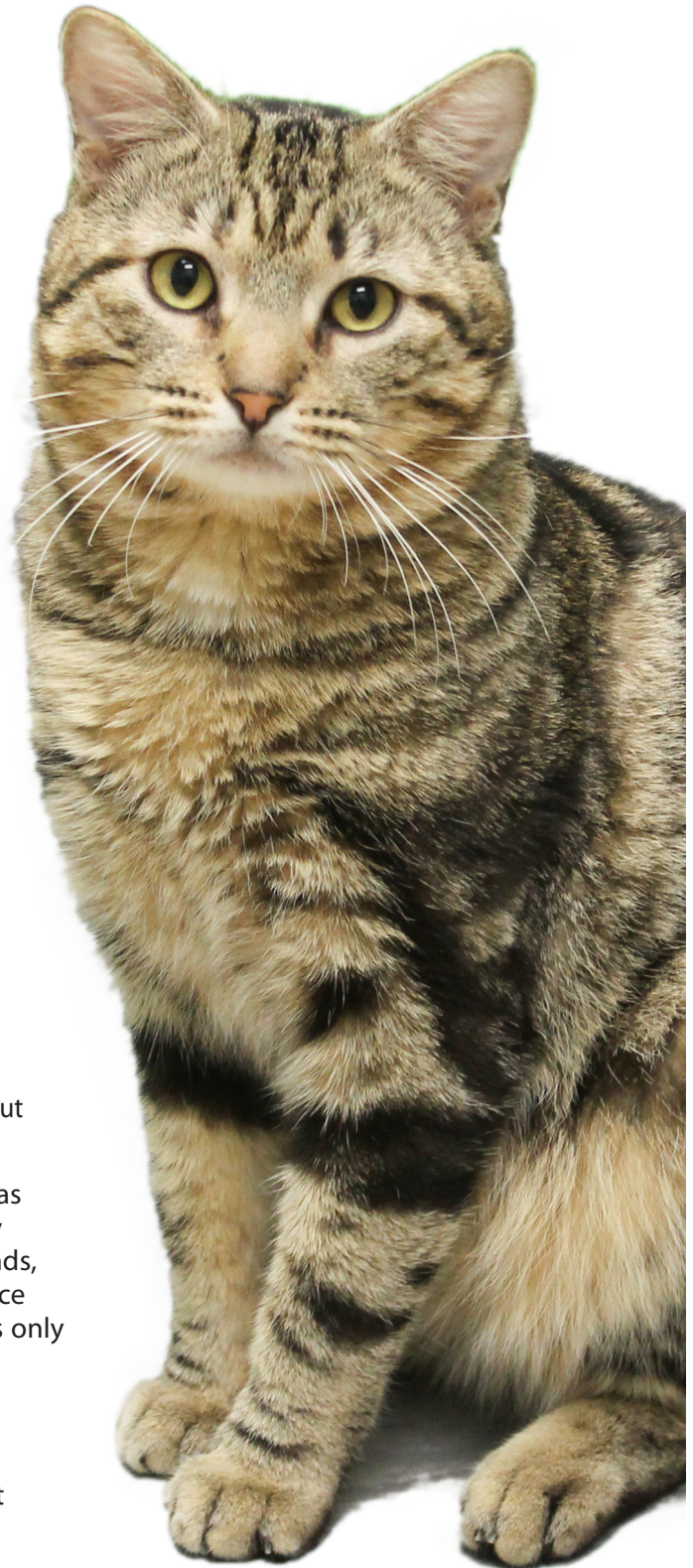
- flicking or swishing of the tail
- ears rotating to the side or back
- staring
- fur rippling on the back or sides
- stiffening of the body

It is important that you pay attention to body language while interacting with cats, as their behavior can change rapidly. Cat's behavior has the potential to be extremely varied and motivated by very different factors.

### TYPES OF OVERSTIMULATION AND HOW TO REACT

**Petting Induced:** You're petting your cat and then suddenly the cat grabs you with their claws and teeth. It's not a full-powered attack, but you still have those sharp claws around your hand or arm.

- What to do? First of all, freeze. Do not struggle or fight back as you may trigger a real bite. If you stay still he/she will usually calm down and release you. If staying still fails after 15 seconds, make a loud noise with your other hand against a hard surface (Do not pair it with a verbal word. This is not punishment, it's only a distraction). Use that moment of being startled to calmly exit. Remember: the better option is to be familiar with cat body language and stop petting before he/she becomes overstimulated. Novices often think such attacks come without warning, but they've missed the earlier signs of a cat that has simply had enough.





## TYPES OF OVERSTIMULATION AND HOW TO REACT (CONTINUED)

**Play:** You're playing with your cat and it starts to grab your hand/foot but then bounds away. Sure, it hurts, but the cat who pounces on your feet and then careens off the wall isn't trying to hurt you — he's playing.

- What to do? Redirect your cat's energy. Continue the play session with your cat using an appropriate toy (ex: cat fishing pole, anything on a string, or a stuffed sock is a great substitute for a human hand when it comes to letting the cat bite, claw, and bunny-kick to his heart's content). Help the cat burn off his excess energy before trying for a quiet petting session. No matter what, never let the cat view you as a plaything, not even an adorable kitten. Wrestling bare-handed with cats or kittens is setting a bad precedent. If your cat persists in seeing you as a plaything, stop the behavior by freezing. Don't give him/her a reason to continue the attack.



**Redirected:** A cat sees another cat, an intruder, a bird, or a bunny outside of the window. She becomes upset. You walk by, they strike out at you. You were just the victim of redirected aggression.

- What to do? This one's tough to manage. Limit this particular cat's access to windows. Be aware of the cat's body language. If a cat appears to be displaying signs of agitation, forgo interacting with the cat. It is best to wait until the cat settles down. If you do not, you run the risk of rehearsing the unwanted behavior and getting hurt.

### LESS IS MORE

With all feline overstimulation, the trick is to eliminate the triggers and work on the cat's tolerance. If you're patient and consistent, the cat will improve over time. The best way to reduce the chance of overstimulation is to stop the interaction before the cat gets to the point of reacting. As soon as you see signs that the cat is beginning to escalate, stop the attention. This may mean that you have to leave the room or ignore the cat. You might simply have to refrain from the interaction momentarily. Most cats will remain happily in the situation, even though you are no longer engaging with them. If you are able to accurately read the cat's body language and stop before the cat acts out, you are helping to reduce or stop the overstimulation.

Most cats will alert you to their imminent overstimulation (biting or swatting), but not all cats exhibit warning signs. If a specific cat becomes overstimulated without warning, it is important to pay close attention to the length of time you've interacted with the cat. Time each interaction with the cat. (Example: If the cat tolerates three minutes of petting, stop petting after one or two minutes). It is important to time these sessions so that you stop petting on a positive note. The positive notes are meant to condition the cat to reacting well in the future.

