

From Your Vet



Are you stressing your *cat*?

If your cat seems anxious or tense, make sure you refrain from the making these 10 feline faux-pas, which could trigger behavior problems.

1. Hug your cat. Cats like to be able to escape situations. Holding them tightly can be stressful, likely because they anticipate that something bad is about to happen.

2. Punish your cat. Swatting or hitting teaches your cat to fear your approach, and telling him “no” merely interrupts inappropriate behavior. Instead, demonstrate what you want your cat do, and reward him for appropriate behaviors. Cats are curious and agile—so give yours places to go and things to do, and keep potentially dangerous items picked up and put away.

3. Grab your cat's head to tousle his hair. Nobody likes to have their head grabbed and rubbed—including cats! Some cats prefer a few long strokes from head to tail, while others like gentle scratching around the chin or ears. But regardless of your petting habits, keep in mind that many cats become irritated by extended, repetitive stroking.

4. Assume your cat understands English. Animals are adept at deciphering body language and very good at figuring us out. Most people don't bother teaching their cats to sit, stay or otherwise, but it's actually quite easy to train them on cue. Just don't assume your cat understands the words you're saying without first showing him what you want him to do.

5. Leave your cat's litterbox dirty. Nobody likes to use a dirty toilet—cats included. Imagine not flushing your own toilet for three or four days! Ideally, the litterbox should be scooped every time you notice waste. Otherwise, scoop it at least once daily, and empty and clean it thoroughly every week or two.

6. Place your cat's litterbox in an inconvenient location. The spot you've chosen for the litterbox might work best for you, but if your cat has to negotiate humans of all ages, other pets, stairs or loud appliances to get there, he may feel like he's on a suicide mission every time he needs to eliminate.

7. Tempt your cat to play by wiggling your fingers or toes, then get angry when he bites or scratches you. Cats naturally grab prey using their teeth and claws. Offer your cat appropriate chew toys so he knows that hands are for loving—not biting!

8. Add a new cat to your household without a proper introduction. When a new cat is thrust into an already related

group, it's in the nature of the clowder (group of cats) to attack and force the outsider to leave. Without a proper period of controlled, gradual introduction, the likelihood for stress and inter-cat aggression increases.

9. Leave your cat home alone with lots of food but only one litter box when you leave for a long weekend. This can be stressful, especially for cats that eat quickly, because they'll have no food left by the end of the weekend. Cats can become sick if they don't eat every day. Timed feeders can be helpful in this situation. A self-cleaning litter box may also be an option, but don't rely on it when you're at home.

10. Use strong-smelling cleansers, deodorizers or products containing alcohol. Cats' noses are sensitive, and these scents can be offensive to them. Some cats may even find the smell of hair spray, perfume or cologne unpleasant, so be careful when using these products in your home or on your person. **dvm360**

Information was provided by Valarie V. Tines, DVM, DACVB, DACAW, Premier Veterinary Behavior Consulting, Sweetwater, Texas, and Colleen Koch, DVM, DACVB, Lincoln Land Animal Clinic, Jacksonville, Ill. For more information, check out *Decoding Your Cat: The Ultimate Experts Explain Common Cat Behaviors and Reveal How to Prevent or Change Unwanted Ones*, by the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists.

