VOKRA
VANCOUVER ORPHAN KITTEN RESCUE ASSOCIATION

Understanding Cat Overstimulation

Many cat owners are puzzled when their friendly, content cat suddenly bites or scratches during petting. While this reaction may seem aggressive, it's usually **not aggression**—it's **overstimulation**, and it's both normal and manageable.

What Is Overstimulation?

Overstimulation happens when a cat's tolerance for petting or interaction is exceeded. It can be triggered by:

- **Not recognizing the warning signals.**
- **Too much petting**
- **Young children noises**
- **Stress or frustration**, such as seeing a bird outside the window but being unable to chase it
- **A buildup of tension** from too little interactive play or too much unrelieved excitement

All cats can become overstimulated, but their reactions differ. Some may only twitch their tails, while others escalate to a warning bite.

Warning Signs to Watch For

Stop petting as soon as you notice any of these cues:

- Restlessness
- Tail twitching
- Ears turning or flattening
- Head will do an abrupt Movement towards The hand.

Response:

- **Immediately stop petting** and let your cat choose whether to stay on your lap or move away.
- If they keep wanting attention, **walk away** to give them a break.
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If one does not stop petting immediately, it is seen as reinforcing bad behavior

Building Tolerance for Petting

You can gently increase your cat's comfort with petting by pairing it with food rewards:

1. Offer a small treat (like churro) **just before** or when the first early signals appear.
2. Lighten the intensity of your petting while giving the treat.
3. Over multiple sessions, gradually pet for slightly longer periods—**always stop before any aggressive reaction**.

This teaches your cat to associate petting with pleasant experiences and helps them tolerate longer sessions.

Reduce Frustration Through Play

5 X 15 minute daily sessions can relieve stress and prevent overstimulation.

Simulate the hunt:

- Use a wand toy that flutters or makes bird-like sounds.
- Make it "fly" through the room or scurry across the floor like a mouse.
- Allow your cat to pounce and capture the toy before starting again.

End the session like a real hunt:
Play for about **15–20 minutes** (shorter for kittens or senior cats). Afterward, wait five minutes, then give treat like temptation or a bit of Churro. This mimics eating prey and helps your cat settle.

What Not to Do

- **Never punish physically. No spraying water,** this increases fear and can worsen biting.

Other considerations: Try to limit the time the cat is alone.

- **Avoid laser pointers** for overstimulated cats. They can’t “catch” the light, which often leads to more frustration.