



## If You Give a Cat A Belly Rub... You May Get a Scratch, Heres Why

BY DANIELLE SULLIVAN | POSTED 2 YEARS AGO

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What cat owner hasn't found herself enjoying a leisurely afternoon on the couch with your kitty sleeping beside you? You admire how incredibly comfy and cute they look sleeping on their back, outstretched and paws up, so you reach over for a loving little belly rub... and get fiercely scratched!

You know your cat loves you (most of the time) so why do they get so defensive when all you want to do is pet them? I mean, your dog would beg and plead for a nice belly rub, so what makes cats so different? Well, there is a explanation and it might help you understand your cat's behavior and also the reason behind why you're now sporting a big bandage.

First off, unlike dogs, when cats are on their backs, it's not a sign of submission, but a sign of defense. That position gives them the ability to use their teeth and claws all at once. While your house kitty is not protecting herself in the wild right there on your couch, she is testing your trust, says Dr. Cindy Houlihan, DVM, owner of the Cat Practice in Birmingham, Michigan. "The abdomen is a vulnerable area for cats because that's where all of their vital organs are located. So exposing it is a form of communication — they want to see what you might do."

So how to proceed? Dr. Houlihan recommends that when your cat is on her back you don't make any sudden movements, and start by slowly stroking her front paws, and then her back paws. If she's OK with that, keep doing it a few times. If she doesn't object, you can very gently start to rub her tummy.

But if you never make it to belly rubs with your cat, don't distress. Dr. Houlihan says you shouldn't be offended because all cats like their boundaries respected, and of course, like people, every cat has different boundaries. However, if you ever do reach the point of belly rubs, "it's truly a compliment."

Does your kitty object to belly rubs?

Original link: <http://www.babble.com/pets/if-you-give-a-cat-a-belly-rub-you-may-get-a-scratch-heres-why>