



Why Does My Cat . . . Hate Belly Rubs?

By Colleen Oakley | June 28, 2012



Thinkstock

If you have a cat, you've probably made this mistake at least once — your normally sweet kitty stretches out in front of you, rolls onto her back and looks at you with big, imploring eyes.

You naturally reach down to pat her tummy . . . and she suddenly turns on you, either scratching you with her claws or biting your hand with her equally sharp teeth.

What gives?

This Is Some Wild Behavior

“Many people think that when cats roll over on their backs, they're [acting] like dogs —

that they're showing submission,” says Dr. Cindy Houlihan, DVM, owner of the Cat Practice in Birmingham, Mich. “But it's actually a defensive position.”

In the wild, cats roll over when they either can't flee from a fight or actively choose not to escape. On their backs, they have the ability to use all of their claws and teeth to protect themselves from predators.

The Owner Trust Test

Of course, you're no predator. So why is your normally loving kitty trying to defend herself against you?

Well, she's not.

In domestic situations, a cat who exposes her belly is actually testing your trust, Dr. Houlihan says. “The abdomen is a vulnerable area for cats because that's where all of their vital organs are located,” she says. “So exposing it is a form of communication — they want to see what you might do.”

How to Handle That Testy Kitty

Although they're not foolproof, Dr. Houlihan does have some tips for helping your feline feel more comfortable when it comes to belly rubs.

Step #1: Start by just admiring your kitty when she's on her back, avoiding any sudden movements that could put her on the defensive.

Step #2: Slowly progress to gently stroking one of her front paws while she's lying on her back or on her side.

Step #3: If she doesn't try to kick or grab at you, graduate to petting one of her back paws. Once she accepts that repeated gesture, you can try to touch her tummy.

"If your cat does ever allow you to touch her belly, it's truly a compliment," Dr. Houlihan says, adding that you shouldn't be offended if it doesn't work. "Every cat is unique, but they all want their boundaries to be respected."

Original link: <http://www.vetstreet.com/our-pet-experts/why-does-my-cat-hate-belly-rubs>