

OVERSTIMULATED CATS



**Aurora
Animal
Shelter**

Overstimulation in a cat refers to a normal response when they are pet or handled in ways the cat finds uncomfortable or in situations where they are receiving too much stimuli at one time. Their natural response can come across as “aggressive,” though, that is not the cat’s intention. An example of this type of response would be when a cat suddenly bites when they are being pet.

SIGNS OF OVERSTIMULATION

- Restlessness: cannot sit still
- Twitching of their tail
- Skin rippling when you pet them
- Turning their head towards your hand ready to bite

These signs can be subtle, so it is important to learn about cat body language, and specifically how your cat’s indicators. Sometimes it can be as slight as a flicking tail, so pay close attention!

DO

- Start slow! Forcing your cat will only increase a negative association with petting and interaction. Start with short periods of time. Let the cat chose to engage.
- As soon as you notice any signs that your cat is becoming overstimulated, stop petting them immediately and give them space. This is important to reinforce that you will respect their boundaries.
- Offer a delicious food reward to your cat while you pet them. Gradually increase the length of time you pet your cat per session.
- Engage in several sessions of interactive play with your cat. This will help alleviate stress and help them burn off pent up frustration. Interactive play sessions may include items such as wand toys. One toy type to avoid, however, are laser pointers. Removing the tactile reward of being able to bite and bat at an item may increase frustration in overstimulated cats. Play sessions should be around 10-15 minutes in length. After every play session, you should provide your cat with a high-value food reward.

DO NOT

- Continue petting your cat even after noticing signs of overstimulation. This will lead to frustration from your animal and potential injury to yourself.
- Punish your cat for expressing overstimulation behaviors. Punishing your cat will result in an increased likelihood of biting or they will associate petting with physical punishment/pain.
- Expect your cat to change rapidly. It will take time and patience to work with your cat.

