

OVER-STIMULATED CATS

Too much of a good thing can be too much.

When a cat's nervous system receives more information than it can handle, they become overwhelmed and may react with agitation, avoidance, or aggression.



THE 6 TYPES OF OVERSTIMULATION



1. TACTILE OVERSTIMULATION

Too much or unwanted touch (petting, holding, grooming) can go from pleasant to irritating. Warning signs are often subtle before the bite.



2. SENSORY OVERSTIMULATION

Loud noises, bright lights, strong smells, crowded spaces, or constant activity can overload a cat's senses and stress their nervous system.



3. EMOTIONAL OVERSTIMULATION

Excitement, fear, frustration, or anticipation (like watching prey) can elevate arousal. A small trigger can cause a big reaction.



4. COGNITIVE OVERLOAD

Learning, decision-making, and paying attention require mental energy. Long or difficult sessions can lead to frustration and shutdown.



5. SOCIAL OVERSTIMULATION

Too much interaction, pressure from people, or no escape from social situations can overwhelm even friendly cats.



6. ENVIRONMENTAL OVERSTIMULATION

Unpredictable routines, lack of safe spaces, too many changes, or limited control over the environment can create chronic stress.

THE STRESS BUCKET

Stressful experiences fill the bucket. When it overflows, even a small trigger can cause a big reaction.



- Loud noises
- Visitors
- Other animals
- Pain or illness
- Handling
- Changes in routine
- Lack of sleep
- Confinement
- Bright lights
- Training pressure
- Strong smells
- Emotional arousal

Look for early warning signs: tail flicking, ears rotating, muscle tension, dilated pupils, turning the head, slowing blinks, or walking away.

AGGRESSION IS COMMUNICATION

Aggression is almost always a distance-increasing behavior, not revenge or dominance.



The goal is to say, "I need space." Respecting early signals prevents escalation.

FACTORS THAT LOWER THRESHOLD

Pain, fear, illness, past trauma, and stress decrease a cat's ability to cope, making them reach their limit faster.



KEY TAKEAWAY

It's not about teaching a cat to tolerate more—it's about helping them feel safe with less.

Listen to the whispers so you never have to hear the shout.

HOW TO PREVENT OVERSTIMULATION



UNDER-STIMULATED CATS

Not enough to do.

Nothing to look forward to.

Life gets boring.

Cats need mental challenges, physical activity, and opportunities to express natural behaviors. Without enough stimulation, boredom can lead to problem behaviors.



SIGNS OF AN UNDER-STIMULATED CAT



Excessive sleeping (cat has nothing better to do)



Overgrooming or licking to the point of hair loss



Zoomies or bursts of wild energy (often at night)



Weight gain and lethargy



Attention-seeking behaviors (meowing, following you, tapping, getting into your face)



Seeming "shut down" or withdrawn



Destructive behaviors (scratching furniture, chewing cords, knocking things over)



Begging for food all the time

UNDER-STIMULATION VS. SHUT DOWN – KNOW THE DIFFERENCE

UNDER-STIMULATED

The cat is BORED and LOOKING for something to do. They may be restless, vocal, or mischievous.

- Actively seeking interaction or entertainment
- Often energetic or persistent
- Behavior improves with enrichment and activity



SHUT DOWN

The cat is OVERWHELMED, FEARFUL, or doesn't feel safe. They withdraw to cope.

- Hiding, not coming out
- No interest in play or food
- Flat affect, low energy
- Needs help with stress, fear, or medical issues



They can look similar, but the reasons are very different!

HOW TO FIX IT: CREATE A RICHER, MORE ENGAGING LIFE

1. PROVIDE MENTAL STIMULATION



- Food puzzles & treat dispensers
- Training sessions
- Clicker training or tricks
- Rotating toys & environments
- Hide-and-seek treats
- New scents & textures
- Change things up regularly!

2. OFFER PROBLEM SOLVING CHALLENGES



- Puzzle feeders & foraging toys
- DIY toys (boxes, paper bags, towel rolls, egg cartons)
- Scatter feeding
- Hide treats around the home
- Challenges should be doable but make them think!

3. PROVIDE SIMULATED HUNTING SEQUENCES



- 3-5 short play sessions daily
- Follow the hunt cycle: STALK → CHASE → CATCH → EAT (or GROOM → SLEEP)
- End play with a "catch" (let them capture the toy)
- Follow with a meal or treat
- This satisfies natural instincts and promotes better sleep!

4. CREATE AN ENGAGING ENVIRONMENT



- Cat trees, shelves, and perches
- Window views and bird feeders
- Safe outdoor access (catio or harness walks)
- Vertical space is essential
- Rotate environments and toys

5. ESTABLISH ROUTINE WITH VARIATION



- Predictable routines give security
- Add variety within routine
- Mix up toys, locations, and activities
- Avoid long periods with nothing happening

IF YOU IGNORE UNDER-STIMULATION...

Boredom can lead to:

- Destructive behaviors
- Excessive vocalization
- Weight gain and health issues
- Frustration and aggression
- A lower quality of life for your cat—and for you



QUICK CHECKLIST: IS YOUR CAT UNDER-STIMULATED?

- Do they have multiple play sessions each day?
- Do they get mental challenges or problem-solving opportunities?
- Do they get to express their hunting instincts?
- Do they have access to climbing, perching, and exploring?
- Do they have variety in their day?
- If you checked "no" to any, it's time to enrich their life!

THE BOTTOM LINE

A stimulated cat is a happier, healthier cat.

Give them things to do, think about, climb on, chase, and discover—and watch their natural joy shine!



BALANCE IS KEY—NOT TOO MUCH, NOT TOO LITTLE.

A calm, confident cat is a happy cat.

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