

## Never Ever Pet Your Cat Here – She'll Surely See You as Her Mortal Enemy

Obviously, that's not a good way to bond with her. While she may baffle you as a finicky feline who's impossible to please, this gives glimpses into why your cat hates this so much - and in contrast, adores you when you pet her in these four spots instead.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Cats can be quite persnickety about where and how they're touched by their humans
- It's good to learn your own kitty's good and bad spots for petting, as well as his "I've had enough of this" body language
- Most cats enjoy petting in areas rich with scent glands, and most do not enjoy belly rubs (though yours might)

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If you have a cat in the family, you've probably encountered situations in which you're lovingly petting little Tigger, when he suddenly wriggles away and puts some distance between you. He might even give you a little swat or nip for good measure. You're left thinking, "What the heck did I do?"

Because pet parents are human and think with their human brains, they tend to assume their animal companions appreciate the same kind of touching they do. But experts know animals prefer human touch that is similar to the touch of members of their own species.

### To Pet Your Cat in the Right Spots, Pretend You're a Cat

In thinking about what your cat might prefer, it's interesting to note that feline friends tend to lick each other, an activity called allo-grooming, so it's possible Tigger would really prefer you lick rather than pet him (not recommended!).

Cat friends also tend to lick each other in spots loaded with scent glands, such as the lips, chin and cheek, between the eyes and ears and around the base of the tail. When kitties rub against one another in these areas, they exchange scents and wind up smelling similar, which is apparently a good thing.

In fact, experts recommend swapping scents between two cats who've never met before introducing them. (If you ever have a need to do this, you can gently wipe one cat's head with a clean cloth and then gently stroke the other cat's head with the same cloth.)

Given the above, it seems to make sense that the face, head and base of the tail would be where cats would prefer their humans pet them, but at least one study shows cats do NOT like to be stroked by the base of their tails.<sup>1</sup> Not everyone agrees with that conclusion, however, as you'll see below.

## 4 Good Spots, 1 Bad Spot

According to VetStreet, there are four good places to pet your cat, and one bad one.<sup>2</sup> Pet here:

1. **Base of the chin** — Kitties seem to really enjoy being gently rubbed beneath the chin, especially right in the spot where the jawbone connects to the skull, which is rich with scent glands.
2. **Cheeks, behind the whiskers** — This is another area loaded with scent glands. It seems Fluffy really likes it when you rub areas of her body that contain scent glands, because those little glands release her scent onto you. She has “scent marked” you without even trying!
3. **Base of the ears** — Guess what's at the base of your cat's ears? That's right — more scent glands. Apparently the goal of scent-marking is to make kitty's territory (including you) smell familiar, and therefore comfortable and safe. That's why head butting or bunting is a favorite feline pastime.
4. **Base of the tail** — Many cats seem to enjoy it when their human runs a hand down their back and applies gentle pressure at the base of the tail. If your kitty amplifies his purring and lifts his backend up toward your hand, he's a base-of-the-tail guy.

Not here:

1. **Tummy** — It's safe to say most (not all, but most) cats don't enjoy belly scratches. This is because if your kitty lived in the wild, predators would be a constant threat. The most vulnerable spot on your cat's body is her belly. Just beneath the surface of that silky skin lie all her vital organs.

Most cats instinctively shield their tummies, though some do learn to enjoy a gentle belly rub. Your best bet is to assume your cat doesn't, and limit your petting to safe areas of her body.

## Petting-Related Feline Aggression

Some cats who don't enjoy being petted a certain way can take their disapproval to another level and show hostility toward their well-meaning human. If your kitty displays aggression while you're petting him, it can be really confusing — especially if he came to you seeking attention, but then suddenly copped an attitude.

There's an explanation for the behavior that may make you feel a little better. Some cats, for reasons we have yet to uncover, have a built-in “petting limit.” In other words, they have a low tolerance for being stroked and petted. When your kitty reaches his petting limit, he's probably displaying body language to tip you off.

For example, he may tense up. He may flatten his ears, twitch his tail or try to wriggle out of your grip. He may even growl. However your cat shows anger, chances are he's showing it before he takes a swipe at you. The trick is to learn his “I've had enough” body language and let him go at the first sign.

It's also not a good idea to restrain your cat while petting him. In general, it's always best to let kitty come to you. Cats like to feel in control of their environment. They want interactions on their terms. Uninvited touching and handling is not a good way to bond with your feline companion.

The more you let your cat make his own choices, the more often you might find him jumping into your lap. And even when he's in your lap, he may not want a lot of petting, so tune in to his body language. Some cats are just cuddlier than others.

## **Sources and References**

[VetStreet April 29, 2015](#)

<sup>1</sup> [Applied Animal Behaviour Science, Volume 173, December 2015, Pages 60-67](#)

<sup>2</sup> [VetStreet](#)

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