

# Why Your Cat Avoids Being Held

Surprisingly, many kitties don't like to be held, and some will only tolerate it for short periods. There's a very good reason for their discomfort in your arms — and it has little to do with you. Plus, the 'I Love You' message that you may not realize your cat is sending you.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- There seem to be as many questions about cat behavior as there are cats (and that's a lot!)
- Nearly half the households in the U.S. include at least one cat, which means there are lots of humans scratching their heads over kooky kitty antics
- Often asked questions about cat behavior include why some kitties avoid eye contact with humans, why others gaze at their human and blink slowly and why so many kitties seem to object to being held
- Gazing directly into the eyes of another creature can be a way of asserting dominance, so it's possible your kitty feels threatened by prolonged eye-to-eye contact
- A better approach when gazing at your cat is to close your eyes for a few seconds, then open them and look away, or simply glance away once kitty meets your gaze

***Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published August 22, 2017.***

According to estimates, over 47% of U.S. households include at least one cat, and the total number of pet cats is over 94 million.<sup>1</sup> That's a 4% jump in households with cats over last year, and an additional 8 million cats!

That means nearly half the families in the U.S. are sharing living space with a **not entirely domesticated feline** whose behavior can at times seem impossible to interpret. In fact, if you have a cat at home, you've probably scratched your head a time or two at his or her behavior. If so, you might find the following answers to common cat parent questions helpful.

## Why Does My Cat Seem to Avoid Eye Contact with Me?

Looking one another directly in the eye is a type of human greeting that doesn't come naturally to many other species. Have you ever wondered why cats seem to gravitate to the only people in the room that don't like them? It's probably because those people aren't looking at them!

Gazing directly into the eyes of another creature can be a way of asserting dominance, so it's possible your kitty feels threatened by prolonged eye-to-eye contact. This is especially true if your cat is new to the family and hasn't developed a strong bond with you yet.

Every kitty is different, of course, but as a general rule, once a cat is settled into a new household and is given consistent care and a dependable daily routine, he'll learn to trust and bond with at least one family member. The flip side of "don't look at me" coin are cats who follow their people around, demanding attention in the form of eye contact and petting.

Also, some kitties (often young males) will fix their humans, another pet or even an inanimate object with an angry, wide-eyed stare as they prepare to launch an attack or run around wildly. If your cat does this, you might want to avoid staring back or you could become his target!

If your kitty isn't confident or comfortable in his environment, staring at him can make him feel anxious and fearful. A better approach when gazing at your cat is to close your eyes for a few seconds, then open them and look away, or simply glance away once kitty meets your gaze. This will show him you are not a threat.

## Why Does My Cat Blink Slowly at Me?

While we're on the subject of kitties and eye contact, has your cat ever done the slow blink thing with you where she looks at you, possibly with an adorable little head tilt, blinks in slow motion and then (sometimes) looks away? Interestingly, just as avoiding direct eye contact is normal for cats, so is the slow blink.

"Cat Daddy" Jackson Galaxy calls this the I Love You Blink. Most cats do it, but many pet parents don't realize what it is. It's a slow, INTENTIONAL blink. The reason Jackson coined it the I Love You Blink is so humans can put intention behind it.

Here's how to share the I Love You Blink with your cat. Look at her with your eyes open, which is as if you're silently saying "I." Close your eyes to complete the silent phrase with "love you," then slowly open them. You've told your cat "I love you" with your eyes. You'll notice that your cat will begin to return that slow blink to you.

Jackson explains the I Love You blink is your one and only way to meet your kitty at the "communicative fence." When your cat meows, she's attempting to jump over to your side of the fence. When you play with her, you're trying to jump over to her side. The I Love You Blink lets you meet right in the middle.

According to Jackson, when your cat closes her eyes in your presence, she's saying, "I allow myself to be vulnerable to you, a potential predator." That's a big deal. And so we respond in kind with our own blink. Cats add to the blink with other subtle behaviors that mean different things, but it all starts from the I Love You Blink!

## Why Does My Cat Seem to Hate Being Held?

Cats are natural predators, but they're also prey. The first thing a predator does upon catching a prey animal is restrain it, which is why your kitty needs to maintain his ability to move freely and escape. It's also why your cat may feel stressed when you hold him, even though you're being affectionate.

Cats like to have all interactions on their own terms (it's part of their need to control their environment), so it's always best to let kitty come to you. Of course, some cats love to be held and cuddled, but many do not, and some can only tolerate it for brief periods. If your cat's tail is flailing about and his ears are flattened, he's had enough — let him go.

The right way to pick up an agreeable cat is with one hand under the chest and the other hand supporting the back legs. Hold him gently against your upper body so he feels secure. If he pushes away, looks toward the floor, flattens his ears or twitches his tail, that’s your cue to put him down quickly and gently.

Sources and References

[VetStreet](#)  
<sup>1</sup> [American Pet Products Association \(Archived\)](#).

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