

Why Does My Cat Keep Attacking Me – and How Do I Redirect Her?

Cats love to play and it's fun to watch their antics, and sometimes we can become the target of that play. Some cats play by jumping out from behind a dresser to swat your leg as you walk by or pouncing on your feet as they move under the covers at night. Many people think this type of play is fun but others might be upset being on the receiving end of feline play, especially if it results in a bite or a scratch. Regardless of how you feel about this behavior, it's important to understand it.



By Kelley Bollen

Cats are predators and as such their play simulates aspects of the hunt – stalk, pounce and bite. Kittens learn their hunting skills through play with their mom and littermates. They will stalk and pounce on mom's tail and rough and tumble play with their siblings. All of this is practice for the important behavior of hunting – a behavior that will keep a cat alive in the wild. Despite the fact that cats have been domesticated for several thousand years and most cats are provided with a meal each day, your pet cat still retains his predatory nature and play keeps those predatory skills sharp.

Engaging your cat in play with toys provides an outlet for this natural behavior. There are hundreds of different kinds of cat toys that you can purchase but you don't need to spend a cent to entertain your feline friend – a simple string can do the trick. Engage your cat in a vigorous daily play session using a toy that he or she can chase around the room. Be sure to allow him or her to actually catch the item from time to time. A fishing pole type toy is a great option but you can also use a laser pointer. Cats become frustrated when their prey simply disappears so the key to using the laser pointer correctly is to always end the game by landing the light onto a toy that your cat can actually pounce on. Some cats like to chase balls or any small item that you toss.

When playing with your cat, be aware that using your hands or feet to stimulate play tells the cat that it's okay to pounce on these body parts. Playing like this can be cute and fun with a kitten, but when your kitten becomes an adult this fun game can turn injurious to your tootsies. If your cat grabs your hands or feet when aroused in play and you do not like it, hold your appendage still rather than pulling it quickly away because this action will stimulate your cat to go after this now moving prey item.

The last bit of advice is to provide your cat with opportunities to hunt for food. Hiding kibble or treats around the house will allow your kitty to do what they do naturally – hunt.

Understanding your cat and providing him or her with opportunities to display normal cat behavior will improve your cat's welfare as well as your bond.

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