



Why do cats bite?

Adult cats may bite to:

- Respond to a threat. For example, if a cat bites and then doesn't back down, this could be the case.
- Stop unwanted actions or behaviours by humans or other animals. For example, if they previously bit while having their nails trimmed and then the nail trimming stopped, a cat may have learned that biting is an effective behaviour.
- Communicate or demand attention. For example, if a cat nips you and then tries to lead you to an activity, such as playing with a toy.

Cats may feel the need to protect themselves because:

- They are afraid
- They are in pain, stressed, or frustrated
- They are following their predatory instincts



If a cat is showing aggressive/self-protecting behaviours, **medical reasons should be ruled out first**. Advise the guardian to check with their vet.

The best way to avoid biting or scratching from a cat is to prevent it from happening in the first place.



CAREGIVER SAFETY AROUND CATS: PREVENTING BITES AND SCRATCHES



DEFENSIVE & AGGRESSIVE SIGNALS IN CATS

Cats will typically display increasingly defensive behaviour before attempting to bite or scratch.
Observe cats in your care for:

Defensive signals



- Hypervigilance
- Agitation
- Nervous pacing
- Fixed gaze
- Tail lashing
- Dilated pupils
- Low vocalizations
- Ears drawn back, flattened against the head
- Crouched body position
- Rolling to their side
- Lowered or tucked tail
- Piloerection (fur on back and tail puffed up)

Aggressive signals

- Hissing
- Teeth bared
- Growling
- Swatting
- Biting
- Scratching



If a cat shows defensive signals towards a certain handling tool or procedure, stop what you are doing as soon as possible to prevent the cat from developing fear-related aggression.

If a cat is exhibiting high fear leading to aggression, stop handling!



If handling must occur, towels may be used as a wrap or hiding space for a self-protecting aggressive cat.

Do **not** use scruffing or “clipnosis” clips, muzzles, or nets.

Elizabethan collars or muzzles should only be used if the cat is used to and comfortable with them.

BITE PREVENTION TIPS

- Do not play with cats with your bare hands, fingers, or toes
- Instead, use interactive toys for the cat to bite, like a stuffed animal or a wand toy
- Continually and gently praise cats for soft paws (claws withheld) or a soft mouth
- Treat your clothing as an extension of your skin and make it off-limits, or the cat won't learn the difference between clawing your jeans or your bare legs
- If the cat bites and won't let go, softly push your hand and arm in toward the bite to prompt the cat to release you. Pulling away from the bite stimulates them to bite even more
- Avoid physical punishment, which only makes cats more aroused and more likely to fight back and protect themselves or engage in rough play

