

Avoiding Cat Injuries
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Sally saw a cute cat outside her house sitting under her bird feeder. When she went outside to see if the cat had a collar with tags, the cat bit and scratched her. The score: Stray cat 1, Sally 0. Every year thousands of people are bitten or scratched by cats. In some cases these injuries become infected and lead to serious medical problems. It doesn't have to be this way. Most cat injuries occur because people do things that intimidate or frighten cats and because most people don't know how to read the danger signs in cat behavior. Below we list some of the things that people shouldn't do around cats.

Never try to pick up or hold a cat that is unfamiliar to you. While you can get away with this with your own cat or cats that know you, this is likely to frighten most unfamiliar cats and may lead to aggression.

Never chase, grab, corner or pet an unfamiliar cat or a familiar cat that seems frightened or threatening. Many cats find quick movements towards them frightening. Even your own sweet cat may attack you if she is already fearful and is approached in this way. This can be a special problem for young children and cats, when the child may not be aware that she is frightening the cat.

Never approach or try to handle a cat during a cat fight. Cats can easily redirect their aggressive motivations to people that try to interfere. This warning also applies to cats that aren't fighting but may be threatening one another at a distance even through windows and doors! Cats can hold their aggressive motivations for up to an hour after such altercations, so be careful around these cats even after the hostilities have ceased.

Never continue to hold or pet a cat that has begun to show signs of fear or aggression. Growling, hissing, laying back of the ears, opening the mouth to show the teeth, dilation of the pupils in the eyes and showing a crouched body posture or an arched back all are signs of fear or threat. The cat is giving you fair warning that if you keep doing what you are doing you may get bit!

Be careful petting a cat on parts of her body other than the head. Some cats are sensitive to being petted on their backs, on their rumps near the tail, on their legs and/or their stomachs. Kitty tummies seem especially sensitive and even gentle petting can get a person bitten or scratched.

It's best to watch for signs of fear and threat in cats, avoid those that show the behaviors and let cats approach you rather than you approaching them.