

Stuck on You

Needy or demanding, it's time to analyze your cat's clingy behavior. Learn how to change your pet's needy ways.

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It begins innocently enough. You can't walk without getting your feet tangled up in the feline version of a shoestring tackle. Then you notice difficulty breathing at night because your cat won't get off your neck. But when you start hand-feeding your cat because it won't eat any other way, you realize you have an over-dependent cat.

Or not.

Cats are some of the most independent creatures around. Most cat lovers acknowledge that if cats only had thumbs they wouldn't need humans at all. These creatures can entertain themselves without any visible means of support; can meditate comfortably in the midst of extreme chaos; can drag themselves back from near death and look good doing it their entire nine lives. Dependent? Hardly.

Even people who don't know cats assume that cats don't require much in the way of outside help. Words such as "aloof" and "indifferent" float around as handy, if inaccurate, descriptions of feline behavior. Not words you would ordinarily associate with dependence.

But what of this cloying, needy, insatiable behavior that resembles dependence? It shows up in cats at times, and you can't ignore it; the cat won't let you.

Most cat lovers love cuddly cats. They adore the idea of the family cat sleeping at their side, twining themselves about their feet and sharing the couch during afternoon naps. But cat people also like some personal space so they can get some work done. When that part of "cat-ness" goes away, it's time to start asking some hard questions.

Sick, or Something Else?

Cats that suddenly develop behavior patterns resembling extreme dependence need a quick trip to the veterinarian. Any radical behavior change can signal medical problems, so before you drag out the behavior books and try to psych out your cat, rule out the obvious.

If your dependent cat is a new household member, especially a rescued cat, it may simply need more time to adjust to the new home and routine. In either case, talk to your veterinarian.