

Snorting or Spitting?

Are a cat's vocalizations actually a form of hissing? A feline behaviorist explains the difference between snorting and spitting.

Pam Johnson-Bennett

Q: I am curious why my female cat, Mini, makes snorting noises, little outbursts of air, when I try to move her against her will. For example, sometimes I will play-wrestle with her while making the bed. Sometimes she hisses but it's never serious. Is snorting a common thing in cats?

Feline behaviorist Pam Johnson-Bennett, author of *Think Like a Cat*, says:

By "snorting" could you possibly mean spitting? A cat who reacts defensively may spit. This is where they curl up their tongue and force a burst of air out. It's a defensive sound usually made when startled. Sometimes the cat will hiss as well. This is common in cats but it's a form of communication you should be aware of so you can work around it to avoid it. If you have to move her against her will, don't startle her and see if you can do it in a gentle way. If she spits when you are playing with her, then you are getting too aggressive in the play and she's getting startled. You mentioned wrestling matches, does that mean you wrestle with her using your hands? If so, please don't do that anymore because that is probably causing her to cross over from play to defense. Cats and humans should not engage in wrestling-type play. The only type of play you should engage her in is interactive play using a fishing pole toy or toss a small toy across the room for her to chase.

If the snorting sound is something she displays while resting or when walking or eating or drinking, and it sounds as if it's coming from her nose, then she may have a growth in her nasal passages and that would have to be checked by the veterinarian. I do believe, based on her description that she is actually displaying spitting behavior but I wanted you to be aware in case.

Best,
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