

## Is My Cat's Reaction to Catnip Normal?

**Our expert veterinarian, Arnold Plotnick, DVM, describes common behaviors cats exhibit when offered catnip.**

**Q:** We gave our cat some catnip earlier today for the first time. After a few minutes, he became very animated, which I expected, but he also became very aggressive. We had a visitor at the time, so I'm wondering if his reaction was in response to the visitor or the catnip? What are cats' typical reactions to catnip?

**A:** Certain plants, when inhaled, are known to affect cats' behavior. The most famous of these, of course, is catnip. The typical catnip scenario for the domestic cat initially involves offering some catnip leaves, either fresh or dried. Cats will first smell, and then lick or chew the catnip for a few minutes. Cat owners then stand back and watch the fun begin.

Some cats show a "like, wow, man" reaction and just gaze off into space. Most catnip "responders" progress to rubbing their cheeks and chin in the catnip source and act a little dizzy. The intense responders will rub their bodies on the ground while rolling from side to side, purring, growling and perhaps leaping into the air. Some cats get a little frisky and will smack a fellow housemate cat on the head. Reactions vary, although most cats experience both a relaxing and a stimulating effect.

I suspect that the catnip was responsible for inducing the aggressive behavior, or perhaps it amplified any aggressive tendencies that the cat might have had toward the visitor (you didn't say whether the person visiting was someone that the cat knew). Either way, I suggest cooling it on the catnip when visitors are present. Only offer catnip to your cat in the presence of his immediate family members.

Regards,  
Arnold Plotnick, DVM