

Catnip Has No Effect on Some Cats

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October 14, 2005 Have you ever met a cat that doesn't go nuts over catnip? Half of cats in the world do not respond to catnip at all according to the What's That Stuff column in the Aug. 1, 2005 issue of Chemical & Engineering News, the American Chemical Society's weekly newsmagazine.

Catnip sensitivity is inherited, says Carolyn M. McDaniel, a veterinarian at the Feline Health Center at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. A kitten with only one catnip-sensitive parent has a one-in-two chance of developing the sensitivity; if both parents have the sensitivity, the chances rise to at least three in four, she says. There is a chemical cause for the response to catnip, McDaniel says. Nepetalactone is one of several compounds known to set off the characteristic set of behaviors associated with exposure to catnip. These behaviors generally start with sniffing, licking and chewing, followed by head shaking, body and head rubbing, then repeated head-over-heels rolling, McDaniel explains. Neurologists don't yet have a thorough understanding of why catnip affects in some felines, but they generally agree that a cat receives the necessary stimuli from receptors in its nose and mouth, she says.