

7 Tips for Massaging Your Cat



By Dr. R. J. Peters

We love our cats and we want them to be happy and well. Since we are their caretakers and guardians, it becomes our responsibility to see that they get all their needs met, along with the extras in life that make it all worthwhile... not only for them, but for us.

The relationship we have with our pets is up to us to create and maintain. It is not the cat's job to figure out how to keep his humans happy. The great thing about learning to take the responsibility for this ourselves is that our cats will return the favor of trust and will be more willing to please us.

The end result, of course, is a mutually satisfying and beneficial relationship with a special bond between you and your kitty.

Beyond the obvious tasks of meeting their physical needs, we also must realize that it's up to us to meet some very specific emotional needs.

Cats are animals, no matter how much we try to "humanize" them, and therefore, they can only reason and think at a certain level.

This means that in order to expect a bond-building friendship to grow, their physical needs must be met first.

They must always know that food is available, water will always be there, and their sand boxes will be clean. There will always be a comfortable place to sleep (probably on you), and there are no surprises in the home, such as attacks from dogs or children, no matter how playful the intent, and that you are beyond reproach in the trust department.

If they feel safe, well fed, and rested, they will be happy. At this point, we may proceed to the next level... total devotion.

While cats... and many dogs... are quite capable of "reading" our moods and acting accordingly (such as hiding when a family

member may be in anger mode and the cat could be in danger of a well-placed boot to the head), this should not be their main function in life, in our homes.

Their "job," if you will, is to be there for us, in many ways: purring when we want to hear that, cuddling when we want to feel their warmth, gazing lovingly into our eyes when we need someone to admire us, and just being gorgeous when we need to contemplate some beauty.

They make great subjects for paintings and photographs, and are wonderful to just look at. We want them to be friendly when we have our friends over, and we want them to be playful when we are in such a mood.

If this is what you want from your cat, then pay attention to the following tips. Cats do not come automatically equipped with these attributes. We must treat them in ways that allow these traits to develop and grow into permanent characteristics.

There are many ways to build friendships with our cats, but for this report, we will consider the gentle art of massage.

Without further ado, then, I present the seven most useful tips to help you and your cat get the most from a loving, health-giving and friendship-building massage.



Tips for a great massage:

1. **Start slowly.** Cats do not like surprises. They thrive on routine and are most comfortable when they are well aware of what comes next in their daily lives. Thus, if you plan to begin anything new, be sure to start gradually. If kitty is sitting on your lap, for example, you might try a few kneading strokes with your finger tips along the spine or shoulders. If she accepts that, try another area. If not, just stop and let her relax again. Eventually, she will accept these gentle movements, especially when she realizes how good it feels.

2. **Keep it simple.** There is no point in trying to force the cat to stretch out in a specific posture, as we do when we are getting a massage. Let the cat relax in whatever pose or position she's already in. Also do not try anything fancy, like a tapping maneuver or deep kneading on a pressure point. This will only alarm her and make her suspicious of your motives.

Limit your massaging to basic moves in the beginning. You can use the more complicated techniques later, when kitty is in the mood and trusts you.

3. **Keep it short.** Since cats do not like big changes in their lives, it's best to introduce something new in short sessions. If you don't get everything accomplished the first time, don't worry about it. There is always the next time. Eventually, as kitty gets used to your loving massage touches, she will allow you to try new techniques in brief moments, until she realizes it's part of the overall feel-good experience. Some cats will even allow a massage to last up to an hour once they are used to the idea.

Still, an entire hour is hardly necessary, unless your cat has some special requirement for a therapeutic type of massage. But even that would only be temporary, lasting until the condition or problem was resolved.

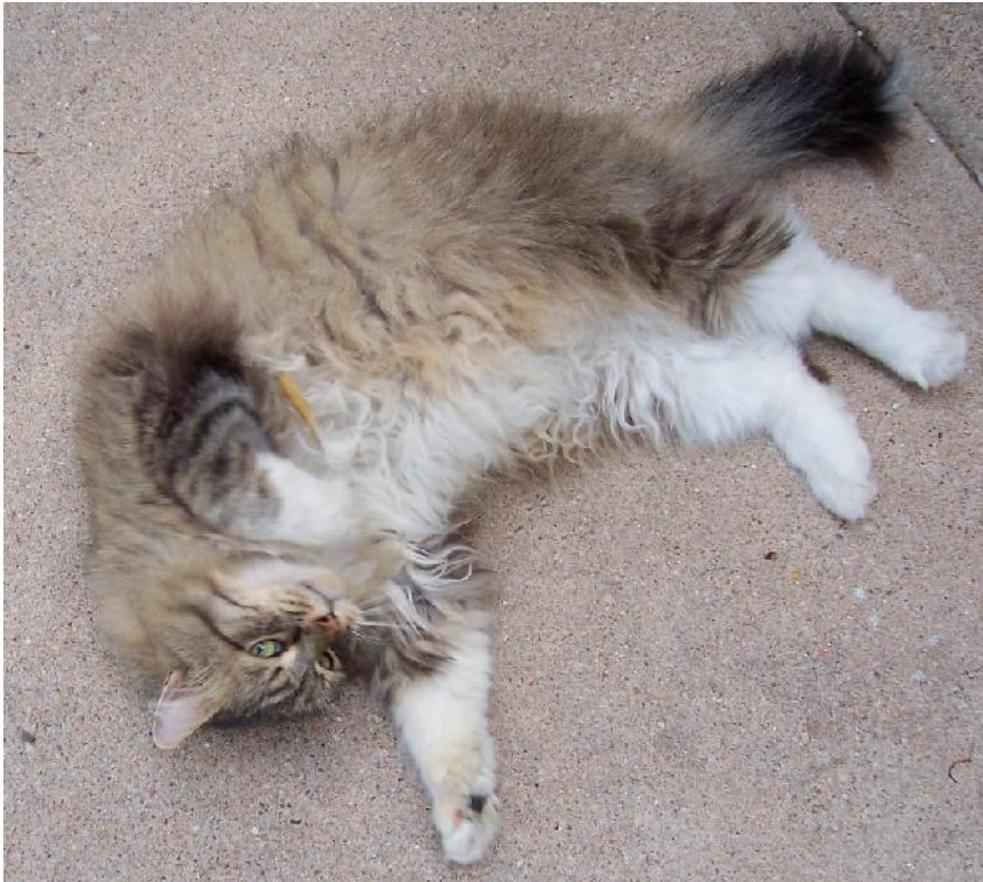
4. While using traditional massage techniques is useful, always remember this is a cat... and some moves may need to be modified to fit their unique requirements. While a human massage could include, say, a stretch that puts an arm behind the back, a cat won't allow something like that. The difference is, of course, that you can explain the purpose of the stretch to a person, who will likely allow it because they understand its purpose. A cat must be shown by experience and not by example or by explanation, as those are not possible. If a muscle might feel better if it can be stretched slightly, and kitty won't allow it, you will have to forego that particular maneuver.

5. **Never force** a session. Cats don't like to be forced to do anything, as you may know. So, if you are in the mood to give a massage, but kitty isn't in the mood to get one, you will have to acquiesce to the cat. If you manage to force the cat to tolerate or withstand a massage to please you, it will probably be her last massage.

6. Provide a session if **requested by the cat!** While some cats might resist your invitation to a massage, others seem to really dig it. Thus, if the cat really does enjoy your magic touch and begins begging you for that kind of attention, be proud of yourself. You have a little convert on your hands. It would be very bad manners to turn her down if she asks for a massage and you simply are not in the mood right now. If you really cannot give her the time at that moment, surely you will have a moment to provide a modified, short session, just to let her know you understand her request and are willing to cooperate. This builds trust and deepens the friendship bond.

7. **Use together time** to introduce, then engage in, the massage routines. As long as you two are spending time together anyway, use some of that time to get her used to the idea of an occasional massage. Just include a little kneading or stroking around the neck and shoulders, or some gentle sliding moves down her spine with a couple of fingers on either side of the vertebrae, and she will soon begin to appreciate the comforting moves you are using. Just don't try to go too fast, do too much, or over do things by going too long. If she wants to stop, then you must stop.

Another tip that can help some cats and their owners to build a great relationship that includes regular massaging in order to build a closer relationship, is to start young. If you begin by massaging a kitten on a regular basis, the little guy will come to not only enjoy it, but to actually expect it!



I've had my massage... How about you?

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About the Author

Dr. R. J. Peters retired from her first career as a chiropractor, went back to school and became a certified computer repair technician and network consultant, was a photo journalist for several newspapers, wrote freelance articles for various magazines and newspapers, including The Denver Post. Currently she is the director of an animal shelter. She has published a book on computer security and several ebooks and articles on other subjects.

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