Why does my cat headbutt me: is it a sign of affection?

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Let’s face it, in the human world, a headbutt isn’t really the done thing. Cat headbutting is altogether different, however, and if you’ve got a furry friend, you probably will have had their tiny head pressed against your forehead or your leg from time to time. Not only is this not an aggressive act, but it could even be seen as a sign of affection.

## What does a cat headbutt look like?

A cat headbutt, which is also called cat bunting, is when a cat uses their head to make contact with something. This could be a human, another animal or even the furniture. Once the cat’s head has made contact with whatever it is, they will rub their cheek up against it.

## Why does a cat headbutt you?

Cat headbutting is something that is also seen in wild cats and something felines have been doing for a very long time. There are a mixture of reasons why:

### Scent marking

Cats have a very highly developed sense of smell and they like everything around them to smell, well, like them! They ensure this is the case by rubbing their scent glands (which are all over their bodies including in their cheeks) against things.

### To show you they trust you

When your cat is headbutting you one minute and then the wall the next, you'd be forgiven for thinking the behaviour is just about scent marking. However, it's a lot more complex than that, and the truth is a cat won't get up close and personal with a human to headbutt them unless they trust and like them.

### Seeking attention

If you're watching TV or reading the newspaper and you're interrupted by a headbutt from your furry friend that probably means they would like you to stop what you're doing and give them some attention.

## Is a cat headbutt a sign of affection?

Some people make the mistake of thinking that cat headbutting is just about marking territory, but scent communication is complex and, while cats do use scent to mark their territory, they also headbutt to create familiarity and show trust and respect. Does that mean that you can take your cat's headbutts as a sign of affection? Absolutely!

## My cat doesn't headbutt me. Does that mean they don't like me?

The short answer to this is no. Your cat is a unique individual and might not be a headbutter. Cats have lots of different ways of showing affection, including purring, kneading, slow blinking and just curling up right next to you. If you're a new cat owner and you are worrying that the two of you haven't bonded as much as you would like just yet, why not check out How to get a cat to like you.

## Why do my cats headbutt each other?

If you've got more than one cat in your household, you may well have noticed them headbutting each other. This is about them bonding and creating a colony scent with other felines in the same household. On balance, you can take it as a win because it's a great sign your cats are getting along.

## Should I headbutt my cat back?

If your cat often presses their head against yours, you may have found yourself wondering if you should return the favour. The answer is there is no harm in trying although obviously it's important to be gentle and observe your cat's body language to see if they welcome the interaction. Some may, some may not.

## Got a handle on headbutting? How about licking?

Headbutting is not the only quirky behaviour you can expect from your feline friend. Anyone who has ever had a cat will have noticed they spend a lot of their time licking themselves and will often lick each other too. A lot of this is about keeping clean, and cats are nothing if not fastidious, but licking can also be about stress relief or bonding. Want to know more? Check out Why cats lick each other and themselves.

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