



Why do cats lick each other and themselves?



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Cats spend lots of their time licking themselves and may lick other cats and even humans. So what is going on? Is it all about your cat cleaning itself (and others)? Or is there more to it than that?

### Why do cats lick themselves?

We all know that cats tend to be very clean animals, and the primary reason your furry friend licks themselves so much is to keep clean. However, there are other reasons too.

#### **To cool down:**

Cats can sweat a little from their paws but their primary method of keeping cool is depositing saliva on their fur and letting that saliva evaporate.

#### **To feel safe from predators:**

In the wild a mother cat will immediately wash her kittens and herself after eating. This is to remove any smell that may attract predators.

#### **To keep their skin and coat healthy:**

Licking helps get rid of any dirt and parasites such as fleas and, because of your cat's barb-like tongue, stimulates the sebaceous glands to keep their coat 'well-oiled'.

## **To remove loose hair:**

The barbs on your cat's tongue also act as little tiny combs that can pick up excess hair. Sometimes these barbs trap the hair a bit too effectively though and your cat can't spit the hair up and so swallows it. This can result in them coughing up or pooping hairballs.

## **To deal with injuries:**

You've heard the expression licking your wounds, right? Well, cats quite literally do this.

## **Licking is natural cat behaviour**

If you've ever seen a mother cat with her newborn kittens, you'll know that her first job, after removing the amniotic sac, is to lick her kittens to clean them and simulate their breathing. Licking is a normal and natural behaviour that is hard-wired from day one!

## **Because they enjoy it!**

Sometimes your cat simply licks themselves, others or you because they enjoy it.

## **To soothe themselves:**

Sometimes a cat who is feeling stressed or anxious will lick themselves. If this happens occasionally it's nothing to worry about but if you're seeing it frequently it might be more of a concern. Don't miss the advice below on when licking can be one of the [signs a cat is stressed](#).

## **Why do cats lick each other?**

If you've got more than one cat in your household it's likely the licking won't stop with themselves and they will also lick each other. The proper name for this is allogrooming. So why do they do this?

- **For bonding:**

One of the main reasons two felines will lick each other is to strengthen the bond between them and show affection. They are also making sure their companions smell familiar.

- **To help each other keep clean:**

You may have noticed that when one cat grooms another, they typically concentrate on the other cat's head, face or ears. In other words, the areas that might be difficult to reach.

- **For stress relief:**

Sometimes a cat might lick another cat because they feel they're anxious and licking might soothe them.

## Why do they lick themselves after eating?

Your cat licks themselves after eating to get rid of any tiny particles of food and any food smells from their whiskers, face and even front legs (did we mention cats like to be very clean!). It's also an instinctive behaviour because, in the wild, the smell of food has to be quickly removed before it attracts predators and to prevent a build-up of bacteria which may cause a skin infection.

## Why does your cat lick you?

If your feline friend licks you, you can take it as a compliment. We've already established that cats lick other cats as a sign of affection so it makes sense that when cats lick their humans they are telling us we're part of their social group!

## How often should a cat groom themselves?

It's estimated that a cat will spend about 30 -50% of its waking hours grooming itself. That's just a cat being a cat. However, if you notice your cat licking, biting or nibbling themselves excessively that could be a cause for concern, especially if you notice areas of fur loss or irritated skin. Which leads us neatly on to ...

## Can licking be a sign a cat is stressed?

Excessive licking can be down to a number of things, including allergies, skin infection, dietary issues, pain such as arthritis and stress. If you're worried, you should chat to your vet. If the problem does seem to be stress, it's worth checking out [How to ease cat anxiety: Our guide to creating a happy place for cats.](#)

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