

Why Do Cats Purr?

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Contentment, comfort, security... for many pet owners, the humming purr of a squinting cat is the unmistakable signal that their feline is happy and healthy.

1. In many ways this is true: behaviorists believe the original function of purring was to enable a kitten to tell his mother that "all is well." This often occurs during nursing. A kitten can't meow and nurse at the same time, but can purr and nurse without any problem. The mother often purrs back, reassuring the kitten using this tactile, resonant communication.

This is why your cat purrs when petted, instinctively giving the signal "all is well," a message you can both feel and hear.

But this isn't the only message purring may signal:

2. Older cats purr when they play or approach other cats, signaling they are friendly and want to come closer.
3. Cats also purr when they are distressed or afraid. Sick and injured cats, and those in veterinary offices often purr. It is thought that this is the cat's way of reassuring and calming herself.

Purring is one of several methods of non-verbal communication felines use to convey their moods and needs. Others include squinting or slow blinking, stretching, scratching, facial rubbing, and spraying. So the next time your cat is purring deeply while curled in your lap, try purring back - she'll know what you're saying!

Ways to make YOUR cat purr...

Catnip

Toys

Beds

Treats

Veterinary Perspective...

When a cat is purring, it is almost impossible to hear the cat's heart or lungs very well, making examination of vital signs difficult. Oddly enough, many cats will stop purring if they're near the sound of running water. This is why you may see your veterinarian turning on the faucet in the exam room in an attempt to get your cat to stop purring - so your cat can get a better exam.