



© Credit | Getty Images

Too Much Holiday Madness?

4 Ways to De-stress Your Cat

BY RITA REIMERS AND LINDA HALL

The holidays are a joyous time for us humans — decorations, parties, gifts and special traditions. We spend more time with our family and friends, celebrating with lots of laughter and, of course, too much food. Celebrations are so much fun, and we eagerly await them every year.

But wait! That's the human view of these special times. Is your cat enjoying these festivities, too? Probably not.

Our feline friends are well-known for hating change — any kind of change. In your cat's purrfect world, all routines must be followed, without exception,

and it doesn't matter what date the calendar reads. But that doesn't work too well with human holidays. Cats easily get stressed and anxious, and all the new sights, sounds and people the holidays bring can often spell misery for your kitty.

What your cat wants you to know

Those decorations may bring you joy, but you made a lot of noise getting them out — especially if there are bells and music that go along with them. In your cat's mind, they don't belong in her house, and the decorations often smell funny from being packed in the attic all year. They don't smell like the rest of the things in the house, and that can be a bit scary for your cat. The greatest injustice is that you brought all of this into your cat's space, then got mad at her when she tried to investigate (or even taste) those things. Hisses to you!

Next, can we discuss all the people who are popping by? You may call them friends and family, but your cat calls them intruders. Some days, groups of these interlopers invade her territory at the same time! Many of them gather, they are loud, and some have the nerve to tell kitty to go away when she was

just trying to make friends. Still other guests may keep trying to pet your cat, when she hasn't yet decided it's OK for them to touch her. She has not had time to observe these people and make up her mind about them yet. Your cat may lash out at these well-meaning people, or she may simply go hide under the bed until they're gone. How would they like it if someone showed up at their house and started poking at them? Another hiss!

On top of all that, sometimes our cats get much less attention from us during this season as our focus shifts to all the things we need to do to prepare for and then celebrate the holiday. Kitty gets bored and lonely, feeling like her resources (including you) are being taken away. And, she may even decide those decorations are fair game for creating her own entertainment (and get herself in trouble in the process). That's no fun for kitty, either — and is definitely worth another hiss!

Easy ways to de-stress

What can we do to help our feline friends stay stress-free, so they can enjoy the holiday festivities, too?

Here are a few simple steps to keep

in mind when it comes to your cat, your guests and the holiday festivities.

1. Take it slow. When bringing decorations out from wherever they have been stashed all year, go slow. Bring them out just a few at a time, and let your cat give them some sniffs. When you start opening the boxes, let kitty look, sniff and see the contents (safely, of course). This will slow down the process for you, yes, but it will help your cat feel that things aren't out of her control.

2. Give kitty a place of her own. If you're having a large party with people coming and going, set up a "safe room" for your cat — a quiet place where she can relax. When we ran our cat sitting company, we had a client who would hire one of our sitters to stay in the bedroom with his cat to ensure she wasn't scared by all the noise, while giving her some pampering, too. People the cat knew would pop in (one at a time) to say hello and give her a treat or some chin rubs. Set up your cat's safe room with cozy bedding, a litter box, food and water. Play some soft, soothing music, like Music For Cats (musicforcats.com) by David Teie, to help keep kitty's energy calm. Putting your cat in another room behind a closed door will also

prevent an accidental escape outside as your guests come and go.

3. Be polite. Should you have guests spending the night, ask them to please not rush after the cat or force her to interact. Instead, let the cat approach them first. Then, they should offer their hand for a sniff and drop a treat for kitty to enjoy. Only engage further if the cat seems to welcome the attention from your visitors.

4. Provide some special time. Make time to cuddle and play with your cat at the beginning of the day before guests arrive and at the end of the day when all is quiet. One-on-one time with you will keep your cat from feeling neglected and acting out in unpleasant ways to show her displeasure. Give her some yummy goodies and perhaps a new toy or two, so the holiday feels happy and stress-free for her, too.

The holidays should be a time of joy for everyone in your household, including your cat. Taking steps to ensure your cat remains her usual stress-free self will help reduce stress for you, too, so you and kitty can both celebrate with joy. 🐾



Rita Reimers and **Linda Hall** are co-founders of The Cat Behavior Alliance, offering a unique Duo-Approach to cat behavior correction. Visit them at CatBehaviorAlliance.com for more information. You can also find Rita and Linda on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok @CatBehaviorAlliance.

