



SOSHB is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of lost and stray pets of Huntington Beach.

## Why Does My Dog Kick When I Scratch His Belly?

© Provided by Popular Science

by Loren Grush

It's called the sweet spot. That perfect place on your dog's belly or sides that, when scratched, causes your pet's foot to go into crazy automatic kicking mode. Every dog owner knows where to find this magical region on his or her canine, as it usually offers up unmitigated joy.

As delightful as this puppy kicking is to watch, this reaction is actually a means of self-protection for your pet. It's called the scratch reflex, and it's an involuntary response that exists to keep your dog safe from dangerous bugs or irritants.

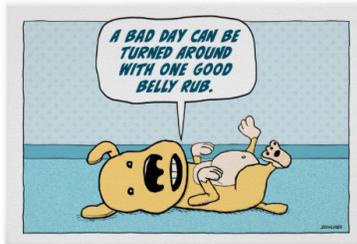
Underneath certain portions of your dog's skin, there are collections of neural pathways that are connected to the spinal cord. When these nerves are activated – either by a scratch or a tickle – they quickly send messages to the spinal cord, which then instructs the dog's leg to kick. For some dogs, the kicking can be more pronounced depending on how much scratching they feel.

“Dogs that have allergies in particular, it tends to be really easy to illicit that scratch reflex, because the dogs are borderline itchy anyway,” says Lore Haug, a veterinarian and animal behavior expert for Texas Veterinary Behavior Services. “But when you rub their skin more, it accentuates the scratching.”

According to Haug, the scratch reflex came about as way for animals to protect themselves against irritants on their bodies, especially invading bugs that could carry diseases. For example, if a dog has fleas running around on its skin, the insects' itchiness will cause the scratch reflex to activate. Then, perhaps the kicking will knock some of the fleas off, alleviating the source of the itch.

It's similar to the reflexes seen in humans, which usually exist to protect us in some way. “Let's say you touch a hot stove, and before your brain recognizes it's painful, the spinal cord recognizes the pain, and you involuntarily jerk your hand

back,” Haug says. “If you had to wait until your conscious brain recognized something was in danger, your delay in reaction time could cause an injury or even death in some cases.”



The scratch reflex can be useful for your veterinarian to determine if your pet is suffering from any nerve damage, kind of like when your doctor tests your knee reflexes during checkups. Also, since the reflex is more for swatting away pesking bugs, it

doesn't necessarily mean your dog likes being scratched in that particular area. But of course, some dogs do enjoy a good rub on the belly. You'll just have to pick up on cues from your pet to figure that out.

## Letter From A Friend

Dear Karen,

Thank you so, so much for your help with Gwen! She is doing so much better and is able to eat! Again, we are so grateful for your help.



I wanted to send an email versus call so that I could send some pictures of Gwen so you can see how much better (and happier) she is!

Thank you, thank you, thank you!!

~ Sophia

# Keeping Your Membership Current

When we mail you your newsletter, we have a date just below your name. If your date is highlighted, it means it's time to renew your S.O.S. membership. Your membership fees help to cover printing and mailing costs of the newsletter and misc. other fliers throughout the year.

## Stray News - Publishing Info

*Stray News* is published quarterly as a newsletter for members of SOSHB. You may reach *Stray News* at:

**Save Our Strays of Huntington Beach**  
**PO Box 4083**  
**Huntington Beach, CA 92605**  
**SaveOurStraysHB@aol.com**  
**www.SaveOurStraysHB.org**  
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*Save Our Strays offers numerous membership levels. To join or renew, please use the form below. Your membership expiration date appears on the address label of the SOSHB newsletter.*

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# 5 Signs Your Cat is Stressed

The anxiety and fear associated with stress affects your cat similar to the way it affects people, though cats tend to hide it well. Even worse, chronic stress can suppress the immune response causing a broad range of illnesses.

Here are five common signs of stress in cats to help you identify it and seek help quickly.

## Urinating Outside the Litter Box

Your initial reaction to a “potty accident” may be to yell and scream. Don’t! Cats who urinate outside the litter box are trying to tell you something. He or she might be stressed due to rearranged furniture, loud noises, an unclean litter box, or several other factors. Your cat may also have an underlying health issue causing the inappropriate urination. Consult your veterinarian or a veterinary behaviorist to help find the problem.

## Decrease in Appetite

Cats don’t go on fasts or diets like we do so it’s important to consult a veterinarian if your pet suddenly loses interest in food or stops eating altogether. It could be due to stress or to an underlying health issue.

## Isolation

Cats are often mischaracterized as aloof animals who avoid interaction with other pets and people. This just isn’t the case for most pets. In fact, constant isolation is a common sign of stress or pain. Go to your veterinarian to help identify the cause of this behavior.

## Excessive Grooming

There’s a difference between fastidious grooming and licking a spot raw or bald. The latter is a clear sign of distress and one that warrants a visit to the vet.



## Aggression Toward People or Other Animals

Aggressive actions toward animals or people can be a sign of a stressed or sick cat. Consult your vet or a behaviorist before the problem gets worse.

## How to Help a Stressed Out Cat?

If your cat’s behavior changes suddenly in any way, schedule an appointment with your veterinarian. He or she can rule out any underlying medical issues as well as make recommendations to help lower your cat’s stress level. Here are some tips for helping to alleviate stress in your cat:

- Play/Exercise with your cat regularly- Physical activities like a game of “chase the mouse” or “follow the feather” are a great stress reducer for cats.
- Create a safe zone- Set apart an area or secret hiding spot in your home for your cat to escape high-stress events like thunderstorms and parties. In a multi-cat household, blocking the line of sight between cats with a solid barrier can be useful, especially when one cat tends to bully or aggravate the other.
- Choose a high quality cat food- Your cat’s diet is an integral part of his health and wellbeing. Providing your cat with a diet that is not properly balanced for his or her life stage and lifestyle may cause unforeseen repercussions that may lead to anxiety and stress.

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## Pet Goodies

### Apple Crunch Pupcakes

|                                |                                       |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 2 ¾ cups of water              | 1 medium egg                          |
| ¼ cup applesauce (unsweetened) | 4 cups whole wheat flour              |
| 2 Tbsp honey                   | 1 Tbsp baking powder                  |
| 1/8 Tbsp vanilla extract       | 1 cup dried apple chips (unsweetened) |

Preheat oven to 350°F. Mix water, applesauce, honey, egg, and vanilla together in a bowl. Add remaining ingredients and mix well until blended. Pour into lightly greased muffin pans. Bake for 25 minutes. Cool before serving.

These treats are for occasional feeding and if your pet has health issues or is on a restricted diet, check with your veterinarian before using. Make sure to take into account any allergies that your pet has to specific ingredients. You will want to avoid adding any ingredient that you know your pet has reacted poorly to in the past.

### Catnip Cookies

|                                |                        |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 ½ cups of flour              | 1 egg                  |
| 2 tsp of catnip                | ½ cup of milk          |
| 1/8 cup grated Parmesan cheese | 1 Tbsp of honey        |
| ¼ cup powdered milk            | 2 Tbsp softened butter |

Mix dry ingredients. Stir in wet ingredients to make a dough. If too sticky, add a bit more flour. Roll out the dough and cut into bite size pieces. Bake on a cookie sheet at 350°F for 20 minutes until golden brown. Cool and break apart. Store in an airtight container.



# A Victory for Elephants

by Karen Chepeka

It is surely one of the biggest announcements of the modern era in animal protection: Ringling Bros. has announced that it will cease using elephants in its traveling circus.

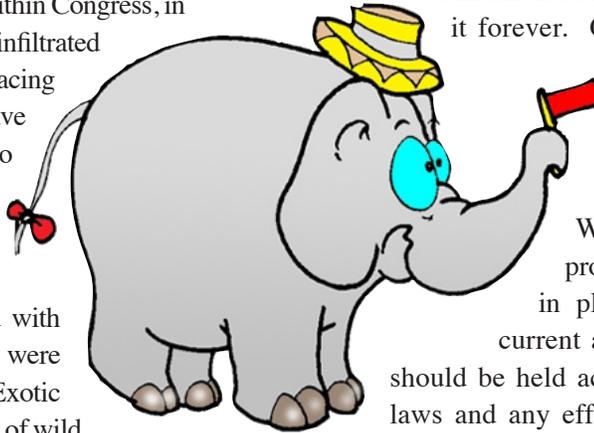
This was a company that fought animal welfare groups at every turn before city councils, in state legislatures, within Congress, in the courts, and in the press. The company infiltrated several non-profit organizations by placing spies in them. Its leadership seemed to have limitless resources and a fierce resolve to keep the elephants so deeply associated with its brand.

I am so very proud that in 2002, volunteers with Save Our Strays worked with the Huntington Beach City Council and were successful in passing the "Wild and Exotic Animal" ordinance which prohibits the use of wild and exotic animals for entertainment. Ringling Bros. representatives attended the meetings and attempted to thwart our efforts but justice for these majestic animals prevailed.

Ringling Bros. cited the number of cities and counties that have recently adopted ordinances to restrict the use of elephants as contributing to its decision. Kudos to their leadership for recognizing that as the world changes, they can embrace that new world, instead of fighting it forever. Good for them for embracing it, even if it's later than we would wish. We urge them to retire their use of ALL wild animals in their traveling act.

We must be vigilant to ensure that protections for all wild animals remain in place in Huntington Beach. All current and future City Council members should be held accountable to uphold the current laws and any efforts to overturn them should be met with outrage from residents.

We can all celebrate this truly momentous victory on behalf of animals!



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