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Cats Scared By Cucumbers: Knowing the Facts Behind the Viral Phenomenon

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Cats Scared By Cucumbers: Knowing the Facts Behind the Viral Phenomenon

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By Aly Semigran November 24, 2015 at 08:03PM

The Internet seems to have an endless fascination with putting cats in awkward situations. Namely, cats being put in awkward situations with some sort of food. (Case in point: [Breaded Cats](#) or [Cats Reacting to Bananas](#).) The latest chapter in this viral phenomenon is cat owners filming their felines' terrified reactions to cucumbers.

In most of the videos, a cucumber will be placed near an unsuspecting cat while they are eating or resting, and when they notice the vegetable, they panic and get scared. We wanted to know not only why cats have such a strong reaction to cucumbers in particular, but mainly the effects that this sort of stress can have on them.

For reference, here is one of the compilation videos that has been making its way around the web:

Best of Cats Scared by Cucumbers.



"While cats may experience some degree of stress naturally in their day-to-day lives, setting up a situation in which to intentionally scare an animal is inappropriate, and could have a negative impact on the animal in several ways," says Dr. Christopher Pachel, DVM, DACVB, CABC of the [Animal Behavior Clinic](#) in Portland, Oregon. "Even a single traumatic experience can predispose an animal to significant anxiety, and more severe outcomes, such as redirected aggression or PTSD, are possible after such an experience."

Aside from the mental and physical trauma cucumbers may cause the cats, there's the social aspect that we are using felines for entertainment value as well. As [PETA](#) Senior Director Colleen O'Brien explains, "Our animal companions are always there for us, and they depend on us to love them and care for them. Guardians should protect their cats from stress and trauma—not try to induce those things just for a cheap laugh."

Still, as [Rachel Malamed](#), DVM, DACVB, a Los Angeles-based Veterinary Behavior Specialist, points out, this cat-scared-of-cucumbers phenomenon may not impact all of our feline friends.

"I wonder how many cats were videotaped before concluding that this is a phenomenon? For example, out of hundreds of cats that have likely now been subjected to this experiment, how many actually had this reaction? Perhaps only a small percentage," she says. "Just as unusual phobias exist amongst people, this subset of cats may fit that bill, or they were simply startled by the sudden appearance of the object."

Whether or not all cats have the same response, Malamed agrees that for those cats who do have negative reactions, the consequences can be quite serious.

"The pet may become increasingly fearful of that stimulus upon repeat exposures," she says. "If a single exposure was intense enough, a lasting memory of fear (involving the amygdala) in association with the stimulus takes place and the pet may become more reactive, fearful, and even aggressive upon subsequent exposure."

Malamed adds that fear reactions may also trigger other behavioral issues, such as re-directed aggression. She further explained that "the pet may generalize to other similar stimuli (e.g., green objects) or may associate events/people or other animals with the intensely negative experience," she says. "For example, the cat who ate just before experiencing intense fear may associate his food (conditioned stimuli) with the fear eliciting stimulus (unconditioned stimuli). This is called classical conditioning. So, what seems like a 'funny' trick may have more serious and long lasting implications for some cats."

So rather than scaring our cats with certain vegetables for the amusement of the Internet, we should be finding ones to feed them to keep them healthy and happy.

Image via [YouTube](#)

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