The compound nepetalactone, one of the volatile compounds given off by catnip, enters the cat’s nasal tissue. After entering the nasal tissue, the compound binds to protein receptors, stimulating neurons, which then signal to the brain. The brain signals the amygdala (responsible for emotional responses) and the hypothalamus (behaviour responses). The cat exhibits behaviour similar to that seen in response to cat pheromones. This lasts for about 10 minutes.

The susceptibility of cats to catnip is gene dependent and hereditary, and as such not all cats will exhibit a response. Additionally, young kittens aren’t affected until they reach sexual maturity. The response to catnip lasts for approximately ten minutes.

Why do cats go crazy for catnip? This graphic takes a look at the chemical compound responsible and how it works.

**THE CHEMISTRY OF CATNIP**

Why do cats go crazy for catnip? This graphic takes a look at the chemical compound responsible and how it works.

**THE EFFECT OF CATNIP**
- Member of same plant family as mint.
- Effect on cats known since the 1700s.
- Affects both domestic cats and wild cats, including lions, tigers and leopards.
- Is also used as a mild sedative and anti-spasmodic agent in humans.
- Can also be used as an insect repellent.

**THE FELINE RESPONSE**
- Sniffing
- Licking
- Chewing
- Head shaking
- Chin rubbing
- Cheek rubbing
- Headover rolling
- Body rubbing
- Vocalisation

**APPARENT PERCENTAGE OF CATS AFFECTED BY CATNIP**

70%

The susceptibility of cats to catnip is gene dependent and hereditary, and as such not all cats will exhibit a response. Additionally, young kittens aren’t affected until they reach sexual maturity. The response to catnip lasts for approximately ten minutes.

**AGE UNDER WHICH CATS ARE UNAFFECTED**

6-8 weeks