

Nighttime Activity in Cats

Cats are known for sleeping long hours, but when they're not snoozing, they can be very active. Those periods of activity often happen during the night. If your cat attempts to wake you after you've gone to bed, he may want to play, eat or simply enjoy your company. Young cats under one year of age in particular can drive their owners crazy from sleep deprivation!

Understand that the cat's ancestor, the African wildcat, is mostly nocturnal. Domestication has shifted our pet cats' activity patterns to be more diurnal (awake during the day), but most cats still tend to wake at least twice during the night. The good news is that cats can learn to let their owners sleep in peace.

RULE OUT MEDICAL PROBLEMS FIRST

If your cat restlessly wanders around your house at night meowing or crying, he may be suffering from an underlying medical problem that causes pain or discomfort. If you think this may be the case, take your cat to the vet to rule out medical issues—especially if you notice that he meows excessively during the day as well as at night.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CAT KEEPS YOU AWAKE AT NIGHT

To prevent your cat from disturbing you while you sleep, try the following suggestions:

- Schedule a few interactive play sessions with your cat during the evening. Try using toys that can mimic the movement of mice and birds, such as toys that dangle and wiggle. Games with ping-pong balls, soft balls and furry mice toys are great for cats who like to fetch. Play until your cat seems tired.
- Feed your cat a main meal just before your bedtime. Cats tend to sleep after a big meal. If your cat continues to wake you during the night for food, purchase a timed feeder that you can fill and set to dispense once or twice during the night. If your cat's hungry, he'll learn to wait by the feeder rather than bother you while you're sleeping. Make sure you reduce meal sizes so that your cat doesn't gain weight.
- Incorporate a variety of enrichment activities to keep your cat busy during daylight hours. The more active your cat is during the day, the more likely that he'll sleep at night. Please read our article, *Enriching Your Cat's Life*, to learn about ways to enrich your cat's life. If your cat is social with other cats, consider adding a second cat to your family. If the two cats are compatible, they'll probably play with each other and leave you alone at night. However, romping cats can make quite a racket, which might disturb your sleep just as much as one cat trying to wake you!
- Playful cats sometimes unintentionally injure their sleeping owners. For instance, your cat might notice your eyes moving under your lids as you sleep and swat at your face in play. If your cat tries to play with you or wake you while you're sleeping, you might need to shut him out of your bedroom at night. If he cries and scratches at the door, you can discourage him by placing something in front of the door that he won't want to step on, such as vinyl carpet runner placed upside-down to expose the knobby parts, double sided sticky tape, aluminum foil or a Scat Mat™ (available at Alternately, you can set a "booby trap" outside your door. Try hanging your blow dryer off the bedroom door knob, or placing your vacuum cleaner five or six feet away from the door. Plug the dryer or vacuum into a remote switch (available from Radio Shack). When your cat wakes you by meowing outside your door, you can hit a button on the remote to turn on the appliance. Your startled cat probably won't return to your door after that!
- If you need help, don't hesitate to call in the experts. Please see our article, *Finding Professional Help*, to locate a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (CAAB or ACAAB) or a board-certified veterinary behaviorist (Dip ACVB).

WHAT NOT TO DO

Unless you suspect that your cat is waking you up because he's hurt or sick, don't get out of bed and attend to him. If you get up and feed your cat, play with him or even interact with him, you will have inadvertently rewarded him for waking you. As a result, he'll try harder and harder to wake you each subsequent night. Even getting out of bed to scold your cat won't work well, because negative attention from you may be better than no attention at all.

Source:

- ASPCA: <http://www.asPCA.org/Pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/cat-articles>