
How to Get Some Sleep (and still keep the cat!)

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Cats are nocturnal. It is normal for them to be active at night. If you find this annoying, rather than punish your cat for following her natural activity schedule, train her to shift her active phase to earlier in the evening or later in the morning. You might find it easier to provide kitty with quieter night time activities that are less intrusive on your sleep; and don't let kitty use your bed and bedroom as the playing field.

Who's Training Who?

The first rule of treating this behavior problem is not to make matters worse. One reason your cat is acting this way is because you are allowing him to. Some owners actually get up and play with their cat, thinking he is lonely. Others feed the cat and then wonder why kitty wakes them up in the middle of the night. Basically they have been training and rewarding him to do so. Certainly you should be sensitive to your cat's needs and feelings, but if he is lonely or hungry, then play with him or feed him earlier in the evening.

Day or Night Shift

Night time activities are the norm for nocturnal animals such as cats. Given the choice, a cat would sleep all day long and then about eight or nine in the evening, she would get up, stretch, scratch, eliminate and go about the business of being a cat. Cats are most active from middle/late evening to the early hours of the morning. The only thing wrong is that the cat's activity schedule is 180 degrees out of phase with yours. All that needs to be done is to change your cat's working schedule from night shift to day shift. This is much easier than it sounds.

You cannot expect your cat to sleep 24 hours a day. He needs to play sometime. If you find his nightly play sessions bothersome, then make sure your cat plays earlier. If you do not provide him with some kind of daytime activity, he will spend the day asleep. Rather than letting your cat snooze all evening while you are watching Oprah or Jeopardy, turn off the tube, get down on the floor and play with your cat. Tie a feather or piece of crumpled paper to a length of string and run around the house dragging it behind. Train your cat to climb his scratching post; train him to fetch and run back and forth between you and a friend. Visit your local pet store and look for new and interesting toys for your cat. Make toys of your own. Most cats have a wonderful time rolling around inside a large, open paper bag or box sprinkled with catnip. The "Cat Dancer" toy is also extremely appealing to most cats. Try to tire out your cat early in the evening. This will greatly increase the likelihood that he will sleep at night.

The more regular you make the cat's new routine, the quicker he will adjust. Schedule feedings and playtime at regular intervals that are appropriate for the schedule you wish your cat to keep.

Patience

Anytime during the day or evening when you see your cat sleeping -wake him up! Gently be a pest just like he is towards you at 3 in the morning. Don't let him sleep. Insist that he play with you now. In 10 days to 2 weeks your cat will sleep all night long because he has been sleep deprived during the day and because he is content that his needs are being filled. It may take 10 days to 2 weeks to reset kitty's internal clock so don't be discouraged that during this time, even though you are doing every thing right, he will still automatically wake up or think he wants to play in the wee hours of the morning. Just wait it out. If you give up too soon, you will have to start all over again.

Sneak Attacks

After you have provided an enjoyable and acceptable outlet for your cat's stir-crazy periods, it is time to teach him that bothering you by jumping on your face or meowing outside the bedroom door is one big mistake. Each time your cat bothers you, give him a quick squirt with a water sprayer that is kept on the bedside table. Use only plain water in the squirter. After only a couple of squirts, your cat will get the

idea. If he is meowing outside the bedroom door, first reach for the water sprayer, quietly get out of bed and creep towards the door, then suddenly fling the door open, squirt the cat and then immediately shut the door. Try to stay alert for five minutes, waiting by the door with the water sprayer ready in case of a second attack.

Some cats actually enjoy being squirted in the face with water. If this is your cat, then obviously it's silly to use a squirt bottle. Try to think of something the cat doesn't like, such as a loud noise or a blast from a canister of compressed air used to dust of camera lenses. Often just the sound of the hissing air sends the cat fleeing.

Warning -No Cheating

If you think you can use the sneak attack portion of training without providing your cat with an alternative outlet for his activity needs, you're in for a big, unpleasant surprise. Your cat will become frustrated and maybe even angry. You will create a problem far worse than the one that exists. Frustrated, angry cats often urinate all over the house and indulge in destructive behavior. So...no cheating!