

Night Crawlers: Night-time Activity

It's always frustrating when the sweet, sleepy snuggle bug cat we love during the day turns into a whirling dervish at night, but the fact is, it's feline nature. Cats are nocturnal, which means their bodies tell them to wake up and get to work just as we start to wind down ourselves. It can make for a difficult roommate situation, and at two in the morning you might be less-likely to remember the affectionate purrs, the playful games of chance, the enthusiastic "biscuit making" or the loving head-bumps quite as fondly as you would at high noon. With just a little manipulation, you can get your cat adjusted to your routine, and you'll both reap the benefits of a healthy relationship and a good night's sleep.

For starters, be sure your cat is spayed or neutered. In addition to preventing many diseases, and eliminating the potential for unwanted litters in our already very overpopulated state, altering your cat gets rid of hormones that tell all the neighborhood cats that someone in your house is ready for action. Cats have a sense of smell about fourteen times stronger than a human's and those hormones can really travel; cats will come from all over raising quite a ruckus just to flirt up a storm with your precious kitty!

Even altered cats will generally be more active at night, but you can create habits in them that will counteract this. During the day, be sure you're giving your cat enough attention. There are lots of terrific interactive toys on the markets, from dangling ribbons to games of fetch that you can play together to tire your tiny tiger out. There are even toys that hold an entire meal, so kitty has to work to get to his food, tapping into his inner lion with a game of hunt-and-destroy. He'll have more mental and physical stimulation, so he'll stay healthy and happy, and burning up some of that energy will make him more willing to snooze away at night.

Feed him at night, especially wet food. It sounds simple – and it is – but there's some science behind it. When a cat eats, he salivates (and wet food increases the moisture). When a cat salivates, he grooms. When a cat grooms, he relaxes (much like you do after a massage). And when a cat relaxes... cat nap time! Making dinner time part of your ritual before bedtime means that you and kitty will be reaching for those pillows right about the same time.

Most importantly is to avoid giving in to your cat's desire when he's inviting you to party after your bedtime. If he really won't sleep, make sure he's got food, water, plenty of toys, and access to a clean litter box, and then close your bedroom door and don't answer! Each time you answer, speak to him, or interact at all, you're giving him what he wants – attention from you – and that only means he'll try harder tomorrow. If you've followed all the steps above, he'll get the hint, and it won't be long before the caterwauling ceases and your cat nap becomes the stuff of dreams.



**If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Behavior and Training Department by phone: 410-235-8826 Ext. 151 or by email: trainer@mdspca.org*