



Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA

Nocturnal Activity

Why does your cat like to scurry around the house at 3 A.M., meowing up a storm and batting balls across the hardwood floor? Cats are nocturnal. It's normal for them to be active at nighttime. If you find this behavior annoying, don't punish your cat. Train him to become more active earlier in the evening. You can also provide him with quieter late-night activities.

Treatment

The first goal in solving behavior problems is to not make matters worse. Your efforts to discourage the cat may be reinforcing the misbehavior. Any attempt to reason with a cat at 3 A.M. will generally make matters worse. Some people actually get up and play with the cat, thinking he is lonely. Others feed the cat when he pesters them -- and then they wonder why the cat wakes them up at night! Without realizing it, they have been training the cat to wake them because the cat was rewarded -- with food or attention. You should not be insensitive to your cat's feelings, but if he is lonely or hungry, play with him or feed him earlier in the evening.

Given the choice, most cats will sleep all day. At about 8 or 9 pm, they will rise, stretch, scratch, eliminate, and go about the nightly business of being a cat. Cats are naturally most active from middle/late evening to dawn. This schedule is 180 degrees out of phase with yours. Therefore, you need to change the cat's working schedule from night-shift to day-shift.

You cannot expect the cat to sleep 24 hours a day. He needs to play and be active some time. If you do not provide him with daytime activity, he'll spend the day asleep. Rather than letting him doze all evening while

you are watching television, get down on the floor, and play with your cat. Tie a feather or a piece of crumpled tinfoil to a length of string and run around the house, dragging the toy. Train him to climb his scratching post (see flyer titled *Solving Common Cat Problems*). Train him to fetch and to run back and forth -- or, better yet, up and down a flight of stairs -- between you and a friend (see *Training flyer*). If you tire him out in the evening, he will sleep through the night. If he still becomes active late at night, provide him with quiet (i.e., soft) toys until he is fully acclimated to a day-shift routine.

Reprimands

Now that you have provided an enjoyable and appropriate outlet for your cat's maniacal energy attacks, you can teach him that bothering you by jumping on your face or meowing outside the bedroom door is a big mistake. Each time he pesters you, give him a quick squirt with a water pistol that is kept on the bedside table. Use only plain water in the squirt pistol. After a few squirts, the cat will get the idea. If he is meowing outside the bedroom door, first reach for the water pistol, quietly get out of bed and creep towards the door, then fling open the door and squirt the cat. Shut the door immediately. Try to stay on the alert for five minutes, waiting by the door with pistol 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 gun. Find something the cat doesn't like, such as a loud sudden noise or a blast from a canister of compressed air (used to clean camera lenses). Often, just the sound of the hissing air sends the cat fleeing.

For more info, call our free Behavior Helpline (650/340-7022 x783 or, for Spanish, x786) or consider a low-cost consultation. To make a consultation appointment, call 650/340-7022 x667. The PHS/SPCA Behavior Department, like many shelter programs, is funded by donations.