

Cat-Napping the Night Away

Andrea Vardaro Tucker, ELS

With his owner, Denise Burchard, gone all day, Tigger, a smart and active tabby, now eight years old, would seek her attention all through the night. According to Denise, "He would wake me up multiple times throughout the night by meowing, clawing at the door, and knocking things over." After many years without uninterrupted sleep, Denise turned to applied animal behaviorist Sophia Yin, DVM, MS, for advice.

RESTLESS CATS AND SLEEPLESS NIGHTS

Tigger's story is common, says Dr. Yin, who sees many cases of nocturnal vocalizing in cats. Nocturnal behaviors often include bids for the owner's attention, early-morning meowing for food, and other loud nighttime activity that disturbs the owner. Responding to the cat only reinforces the undesirable behavior by rewarding it.

Cats are crepuscular, meaning that they tend to be active at twilight. (In cats, this tendency stems from their instinct for hunting rodents at dusk and in the early morning while their own predators are asleep.) However, according to Gary M. Landsberg, DVM, DACVB, DECVBM-CA, of the North Toronto Animal Clinic in Thornhill, Ontario, Canada, most cats will readily adapt to nighttime sleep with proper daytime activity and feeding.

Nocturnal behaviors could be a signal that your cat has a behavioral or medical issue or even an indication of cognitive dysfunction in senior cats. See your veterinarian if your cat

suddenly develops disturbing nocturnal behavior or if he shows signs of discomfort, changes in personality, or a change in eating, drinking, or elimination patterns.

THE PURR-FECT SLEEP

Retraining Tigger required a few steps. Dr. Yin gave Tigger a puzzle box that made him work for his food. Denise also trained him using basic commands, which increased their interaction during the day. And at night, she used a remote treat dispenser, which allowed her to reward Tigger when he was quiet, without her needing to get out of bed.

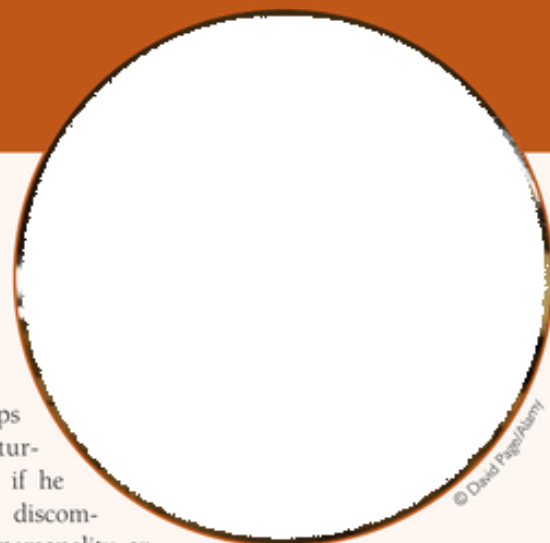
"The primary treatment needs to focus on providing a daytime environment where the cat is sufficiently enriched so he is more likely to sleep through the night," says Dr. Landsberg. To keep your cat properly stimulated during the day so he can sleep soundly at night, follow these tips:

- Provide toys and tools that allow him to hunt food.
- Give several small meals during the day (consider using an automated feeder if you aren't home).
- Interact with your cat, using toys he can chase and pounce on.
- Hold formal training sessions, complete with rewards.
- Discourage him from lounging and sleeping all day (if you aren't home during the day, consider leaving a TV or radio on or keeping window shades up).
- Provide places he can perch on, scratch, and explore.

If other solutions do not work, confine your cat to a room with a litterbox and bed at night. For an underlying medical or behavioral cause not remedied by other modifications, your veterinarian may prescribe medications, supplements, or dietary changes along with behavioral approaches.

Dr. Yin's advice has left Denise better rested and made Tigger a happier and more fulfilled cat. "The formal attention is a must," Denise says. "Tigger requires more engagement than just lap sitting and petting. I love my pet, so sometimes it's a challenge to not give in, but ultimately, sticking with the combination of formal attention and rewards for good behavior is what works." **HP**

Andrea Vardaro Tucker is a board-certified editor in the life sciences. She resides in Yardley, Pennsylvania, with her husband, Dan, and West Highland white terrier puppy, Cole.



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How to Avoid a Ruff Night

Do dogs experience nocturnal behaviors like cats do? According to Dr. Landsberg, puppies adjusting to a new home are often noisy or active at night. A comfortable sleep area is a must, and pheromone products may also help. Similar to cats, though, puppies need plenty of daytime exercise, activity, and play, coupled with a bathroom break before bed.

Adult dogs exhibiting nocturnal behaviors may have a noise phobia or medical problem. Visit your veterinarian if your dog's normal sleeping pattern changes.



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