

# Tips for Optimizing Your Pet's Sleep So You Can All Have a Good Night

By Andrea Vardaro Tucker, ELS

Any new parent will tell you sleep is the most precious—and elusive—commodity, and that's true whether the baby is human, canine, or feline (or simply a new addition of any age). As your family grows, follow our vet-recommended tips for getting more ZZZs.

## Sleep Training

“There's no ‘one size fits all’ for getting a new pet to sleep through the night,” says Dr. Liz Stelow, board-certified veterinary behaviorist with the Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital at UC Davis in California. Factors that can influence pets' sleep habits include:

- Age and history
- Sleep spot
- Other pets, their species, and proximity to each other
- Pet parents' personalities and sleep preferences

Keep your furry friend's comfort top of mind when making a sleep plan, advises Sarah Dixon, a certified dog behavior consultant.

In general, she says, “Adopted **older pets** tend to adjust well to a new home and sleep patterns.” But older pets can also benefit from advice for parents of kittens and puppies.

To get off on the right paw, so to speak, with a **kitten or new cat**, you'll want to be consistent; for example, establish cosleeping or separation that first night. Make sure your cat has a comfortable spot for rest with access to litter—and that he knows when it's bedtime. “Cats tend to be more active at night,” Sarah

cautions, so, as bedtime approaches, play with your cat, then feed him a snack. Signal when it's time to sleep by turning off the lights and quieting down.

## Puppies and dogs

are more eager to sleep, but especially with puppies, you'll want to encourage a nap schedule that promotes good sleep and behavior. Puppies need daytime naps about every 2 hours. For dogs of all ages, prevent naps near bedtime and engage them in play so they're nice and tired when it's time to sleep. Also always make sure your dog goes potty before bed. (Even so, most puppies will need to eliminate during the night.) Dr. Stelow says our canine companions want a “welcoming bed, with or without humans in it.” And that bed or sleep spot might move around a bit as your pup ages or adjusts to his new surroundings.

## Where Should Pets Sleep?

According to Dr. Stelow, “A pet parent's decision about where the pet should sleep is an individual decision based on the personalities of all involved.”

**Crate training** is super helpful in housetraining pets, but it can also be an effective tool for sleep training. At least initially, the crate should be near your room so you can hear your puppy asking to go potty or to prevent feelings of isolation in a dog of any age; you can always relocate the crate once he's sleeping through the night. Crating your dog at bedtime can:





- Prevent nighttime exploration, helping to keep your dog and home safe
- Offer a sense of security
- Be a sign that it's time to rest (as Sarah explains, "This isn't something that all dogs will do naturally, and learning to take 'chill breaks' after activity is very important")

Sharing **your bed** with your dog or cat might work if:

- He's housetrained
- He sleeps through the night
- You're compatible size-wise
- He separates well from you at other times
- Your vet has given the go-ahead

Your pet will need to sleep elsewhere if he aggressively or playfully attacks bedmates who move in their sleep, you're a light sleeper, or either of you is recovering from surgery, an illness, or an injury.

**Other options** include placing a pet bed in your room or inside a pen (along with potty pads for puppies, senior dogs, or those who have been potty pad trained) or, if your pet can be trusted with freedom, simply giving him free range of your home.

### Troubleshooting Sleep Issues

Don't worry if your pet's sleep is already off on the wrong paw. "The first step in helping pets sleep better is finding out why they don't currently sleep well," Dr. Stelow says. "Rule out any medical or emotional causes before making any holistic changes."

It's normal for pets' sleep habits and patterns to evolve gradually; like humans, pets need less sleep as they mature. Baby animals, like baby people,

need lots of sleep to help them grow, but that need drops off over time. However, Dr. Stelow says, "If a pet's sleep pattern changes suddenly without apparent cause, seek veterinary help."

Your vet will check for these or other causes of sleep changes:

- Pain and illness
- Medication side effects
- Stress and anxiety
- Environmental disturbances
- Age-related cognitive dysfunction

In absence of a more serious cause, following these tips might help fix your pet's poor sleep habits:

- Encourage him to get more exercise during the day.
- Discourage napping too close to bedtime.
- Keep cat food out overnight, using a timed feeder if needed.
- Don't interact with your pet when he wakes you overnight.
- Separate pets who become aggressive or playful together.
- Introduce a comfort item like a blanket from your pet's previous environment, pheromone sprays or collars, heartbeat machines, or warm hot water bottles.
- Move your pet's crate or bed closer to your own.

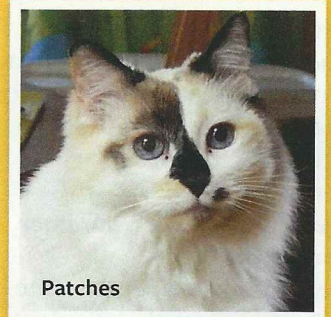
No matter where your pet spends the night, understanding more about his sleep habits will help your whole family rest easy.

*Board-certified life sciences editor Andrea Vardaro Tucker, her human family members, and her 10-year-old Westie, Cole, all get a good night's sleep with Cole sleeping in her comfy crate.*

## VET SPOTLIGHT

### Dr. Norman Lohr

*Nile Point Veterinary Hospital,  
Bakersfield, CA*



Patches

*Thanks to Irene Hansen from Bakersfield for submitting this heartwarming story on behalf of her late mixed-breed cat, Patches, who closely resembled a Ragdoll:*

"In 2012, Patches, then 10 years old, became gravely ill from a bladder stone. By the time she had surgery, she had stopped eating. Dr. Norman Lohr, who has been our family's veterinarian for more than 40 years and 3 generations, removed one of the largest (about the size of his thumbnail) bladder stones that he had seen in his practice. He and his staff placed a feeding tube in Patches' neck and trained us on how to use and care for the tube and Patches. It was a difficult time for us, but Dr. Lohr and his staff were there whenever the need arose. Patches made a complete recovery and lived an additional 7 years because of the excellent care she received.

While all veterinarians possess the medical knowledge to treat pets, Dr. Lohr's compassion and communication skills set him apart. With his calming, soothing voice and demeanor, he has the ability to explain the diagnosis in an easy-to-understand manner and makes sure you understand all of your options. He will support whatever decision you make for your pet's care and always offers his perspective, not just as a veterinarian, but as a fellow pet parent. We trust his guidance and counsel.

His staff, from the front desk to the back room, also always go that extra mile to make you feel at ease, give your pet that extra attention, or provide empathetic hugs during tough times."

**To share your story, see the details on page 20.**