

Cat keeping you up?



Does your cat wake you up at night or very early in the morning? This is a common and frustrating issue. Understanding **why** it happens and how to support your cat can help everyone get a good night's sleep.



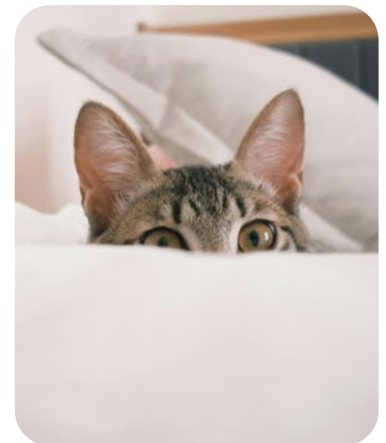
Did you know?

Cats:

- need to sleep between 12 and 15 hours each day.
- don't sleep in one long stretch like we do.
- take lots of short naps instead!

Why does my cat wake me up?

- While humans commonly find a 'purr-sistent wake-up service' to be unwelcome, it is quite normal for most cats to be a little more energetic in the evening and during the early hours of the morning. Many of a cat's favourite prey (such as rats and mice) are active this time, so cats consider it prime hunting time!
- Most cats that live alongside people adjust to our routine, but some might need a little extra help.
- Every cat is unique and can behave in a certain way for many different reasons. The way they behave is their way of telling you how they feel.



I feel unwell



I need to hunt



I'm hungry



7 Secrets to Success – Try these tips to improve everyone's sleep:

1 Speak with your vet

- There are many health issues that can cause your cat to feel restless, wake up frequently and meow loudly. If your cat used to sleep through the night, then changes to their behaviour could be a sign that they are unwell.

2 Create a routine

- Knowing when it's time to eat, play, hang out, explore, and rest helps your cat relax. When cats are able to relax, they are less likely to wake you up.



3 Play hunting games

- Cats are predators.
- They need to practice their “hunting” skills every day.
- Set aside a few minutes each day for your cat to chase a wand toy.
- Lots of short play sessions are best!
- Toys that they can play with themselves (like plastic balls and toy mice) can be fun, but they get boring very quickly, so rotate them or provide new ones often.
- Avoid laser lights, as these cause cats to feel frustrated when they can’t “catch” the dot.
- Do not encourage your cat to play with hands, hair, or feet, as this can lead to injury or unwanted behaviours in future.

4 Let them ‘hunt’ for food

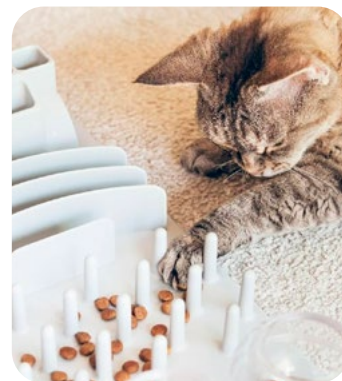
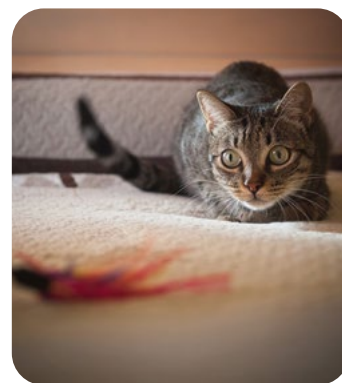
- Use puzzle feeders or create a ‘dry food treasure hunt’ around the home.
- You can read more about this in our handout: “Make food time fun for felines”.

5 Harness their natural routine 🕒

- Cats naturally follow the cycle: Hunt -> Eat -> Groom -> Sleep.
- Try scheduling in a big play session and a snack before bedtime each night.

6 Feed them the way they are meant to eat

- Cats prefer to eat many small meals daily and can find it difficult when mealtimes change and/or they must wait several hours to be fed.
- Rather than feeding one or two big meals, try creating a feeding schedule where your cat can be fed several small meals at the same time each day.
- For example, you could give small portions of food at 6am, 8am, 5pm, and 9pm (depending on your schedule).



Tip! Purchasing an automatic feeder can help with providing meals during the day or night when you can’t and makes sure that mealtimes stay the same.

7 Patience is key

- When you meet your cat’s needs and keep their routine stable, most cats will start to sleep through the night.
- Some cats can initially feel frustrated when their routine changes. If your cat is frustrated, unwanted behaviours may get worse for a few days before they get better.
- If you and your cat are still struggling to cope, a professional can help you understand your cat’s behaviour.



What to do if your cat wakes you up

- Most people have unintentionally trained their cat to continue to wake them up at night by giving them attention.
- As you work through the '7 Secrets to Success', you will also need to ignore your cat's attempts to wake you up.
- While this can be difficult, you can wear an eye mask, earplugs or even close the bedroom door at night so your cat can't wake you.
- At first, this may make your cat try harder to get your attention. This is called an extinction burst.
- During this time, it will feel like you are failing. It's important that you **don't give up!**



What not to do

- 1 Don't 'punish' your cat. It scares them, hurts your bond, and could make things worse.
- 2 Only start a new routine if you are willing to keep it up.
- 3 If your cat wakes you up and you get up to provide food, play, or interaction, then your cat is going to expect this to occur each night, and they will continue to wake you!
- 4 It's not enough to simply ignore your cat. Remember, your cat is trying to communicate something to you, and it's important that you remain curious about what that could be.
- 5 If you want your cat to stop waking you up for the long term, you need to figure out what they are trying to tell you they need by following the '7 secrets to success' outlined above.



Support



This information is only intended as a guide. If you have concerns, please contact our RSPCA NSW Behaviour Team for free advice at mail@rspcansw.org.au

Alternatively, you can book a consult with a veterinary behaviourist at RSPCA NSW Sydney Veterinary Hospital.