

NIGHT ACTIVE CATS

Some cats are active at night, or are awake and 'raring to go' very early in the morning. Since many owners are out at work or school during the day, the cat may spend the daytime hours in rest and relaxation, especially if it is the only pet in the household. The cat's day then begins when the owner arrives home to provide the cat with feeding, play and social interaction.

This is also the most natural time for cats to be active since they normally are most active in hunting and exploration at dusk and dawn (this is known as crepuscular behaviour). Typical complaints are cats that nibble or even attack the owner's ears or toes in bed, walking across the sleeping owners, night time vocalisation, or explosive, uncontrollable play sessions across the furniture and/or owners, during the night or early morning. Sometimes owners can inadvertently reward the behaviour by giving the cat a little food, affection, or attention to try and calm the cat.



To deal with this, owners need to encourage play and feeding during the daytime and evening hours, so that the cat's schedule more closely matches that of your household. This is a behavioural modification technique.

If the cat(s) is an indoor cat, you should consider purchasing an outdoor enclosure to help stimulate the cat during the day time when you are at work.

Adjusting the timing of feeding or the type of food may help to alter the cat's sleep schedule. For example, eating a few hours earlier or later. Keeping the cat awake and active by playing, feeding and interacting with the cat throughout the afternoon and evening can resolve the problem in some cats.

Since night time activity may be a form of social play and attention seeking behaviour, the first consideration is whether the cat is getting sufficient amounts of social interaction and social play during the daytime. This may be particularly problematic for an only cat in the household and an owner who works all day. Offering several social play sessions with chase toys, as well as some reward based training exercises might help to fill the cat's needs. In addition, the cats daytime hours can be further enriched by offering fewer but more frequent meals, perhaps providing some of the meals in foraging and play toys, as well as providing new objects of exploration each day (avoid string toys as these may obstruct the intestines if swallowed).

You can also try feeding a raw meaty bone such as a raw chicken neck or raw chicken wing for dinner a couple of times a week. Chewing on raw meaty bones takes a lot of work and energy and helps to tire cats out and keep them satisfied. Expending energy on chewing at night may help to settle them down for a good night's sleep. It can also preoccupy them for a good length of time. Please see the feeding articles "What should I feed my cat?" and "What should I feed my kitten?" for more information.



Cats that are vocal during night time hours should be ignored. Going to the cat or giving attention in any way may serve to reward the behaviour. If the cat does not get attention from a particular behaviour, they are likely to stop doing it. This training is called positive reinforcement training whereby 'unwanted' behaviour is ignored and 'desirable' behaviour is rewarded with a pat, food reward or play time with a favourite toy. When your cat does something good like being quiet and settled you can reward them.



Punishing the cat for being 'naughty' is likely to simply reinforce the behaviour.

In general cats take a while to adjust to new routines so be patient as they get used to the new situations. For further info please contact the Animal Training Centre.