

HELPFUL HINTS TO COPE WITH NIGHTTIME NAUGHTIES

Has little Bubbles been keeping you up all night? Playing loudly with toys he ignores during the day? Pouncing on your feet the moment you finally fall asleep? Or waking you up at 5 AM for food?

All these behaviors, and similar ones are common among cats. While they are naturally Crepuscular (which means they're most active at dawn and at dusk), domestic cats are primarily creatures of habit. If they have developed habits that don't fit comfortably into your lifestyle, those can easily be called "bad habits". It's important to remember that as far as the cat is concerned, there's nothing bad about them!

So, how do we help Bubbles develop better habits? This handout will hopefully give you some good practical suggestions to help you and you kitty sleep better at night.

Prevention And Modification

These tips can be used to prevent and modify behaviors with kittens as well as adult cats.

- 1) Establish a routine:** If you don't go to bed until midnight and get up at 8 AM, you obviously have a different schedule from someone who goes to bed at 10 PM and gets up at 6 AM. So, set the cat's routine to match yours. If your cat is very playful, and you keep a late schedule, begin your nightly playtime at around 11:30 PM. Give the cat his big meal of the day just before midnight. After several months on this schedule he will likely sleep until 9 AM, or so, and if you have to get up earlier he just might be unhappy with YOU for waking him up!!
It is NOT imperative (despite your cat's thoughts on the subject) that you feed (or play with) the cat when you FIRST get up in the morning or when you FIRST arrive home from work. Feeding a cat first thing in the morning will only increase his desire to wake you up earlier and earlier because he will associate your waking up with the reward of being fed. To discourage this, take a shower, have your breakfast, play with him for a few minutes and THEN feed him. Whatever your personal schedule is, include the cat! **The important thing is to decide on a schedule and stick to it.**
- 2) Daily exercise:** Bubbles needs his daily workout no matter what time of day it occurs. Many cats, in fact, need 2 or more 20 - 30 minute play sessions with INTERACTIVE toys. Interactive is the key word here because the cat's playtime is also his bonding time with you. The more time you spend interacting directly with your cat, the closer the bond between the two of you will be. Yes, lap time is interactive too, but playtime will keep his mind and body engaged with you and tire him out, which will help him sleep better at night. A good play session before bedtime is essential for a good nights sleep for you both!

- 3) **Mental Stimulation: Don't let Bubbles sleep all day!** Keep him stimulated! Believe it or not there ARE ways to do this, even while you're out. Open the curtains, set up a birdfeeder by the window, fill a kong style toy or treat ball with food before you leave in the morning, leave the TV turned on to a nature channel, or play a "Video Catnip" style video (the movie Winged Migration seems to be a big hit in the cat world), leave out a paper bag one day and a big cardboard box the next. Put catnip on the cat tree when you first get home from work, and rotate any solo play toys to keep it interesting. These are just a few options. Use your own imagination to keep kitty entertained!
- 4) **Special places for play:** Establish a location (or two) in your home where you play. This could be the living room, the kitchen, the cat tree or even a large closet. We strongly suggest that you NOT make the bedroom one of those play places. This will only confuse the cat, if during the day he can play there, but at night he cannot. DO NOT play with the cat on the bed.
- 5) **Pick up the toys at night:** Before bedtime, make a general sweep of the house and pick up anything that rolls, bounces, flops or flings! If Bubbles isn't tempted, it's a lot more likely he'll sleep (If you have the rare cat who plays quietly, you can leave the toys out).
- 6) **Sleep alone:** Many of us can't imagine a night spent away from our furry friends, but if those friends are keeping us up at night, one choice is to sleep in a separate room. (Give the kitty his own room, or close your door. You might have to try both options to see which one works better.)
- 7) **Ignore tantrums:** If you choose to sleep alone, you MUST enforce your choice by NOT rewarding Kitty's attention seeking behavior. It may take weeks for him to stop pounding on your door, but if you EVER open it while he's pounding, it will take YEARS. One option for the door pounding is to use double sided tape (they sell wide rolls of this at pet stores – but it may remove paint) on the outside of the door. Most cats don't like the sticky sensation on their paws, so they won't touch it. This can often bring about a quick end to the door pounding behavior. You can also place a plastic office floor mat, upside down (with the pointy, nubby side up) in front of the door (if you chose this method make SURE you wear your house slippers before YOU step on it!). You can also muffle the sounds by sleeping with earplugs, a radio, a fan, air purifier or other "white noise" maker.
- 8) **Positive reinforcement:** If Bubbles is sleeping on your head and you want him to sleep on your feet, place him where you want him to sleep and pet him there. Do NOT pet him (even occasionally) while he is up by your head. In this situation you can try changing shampoo (he might like the smell), and also try placing a pillow, like

the one you sleep on, on a more appropriate location on the bed. Try tempting your kitty with a fleece, a cozy cat bed, or even a wig (if he likes to knead your hair).

DO NOT punish the cat. Physical punishment, throwing things, using electronic collars, squirt bottles, or even yelling can destroy the trust built with your cat. Once that trust is gone, your cat's behavior will become worse, and your ability to work with that behavior will be lost.

DO NOT put the cat outdoors. It may win you one good night's sleep, but it will increase your vet bill and put Bubbles at extreme risk to sickness (rabies, FIV, Feline Leukemia to name just a few), injury (from predators which are more active at night, from fights with other cats, cars and just mean people), and even death.

For more information about cat behavior please visit www.sfspca.org .