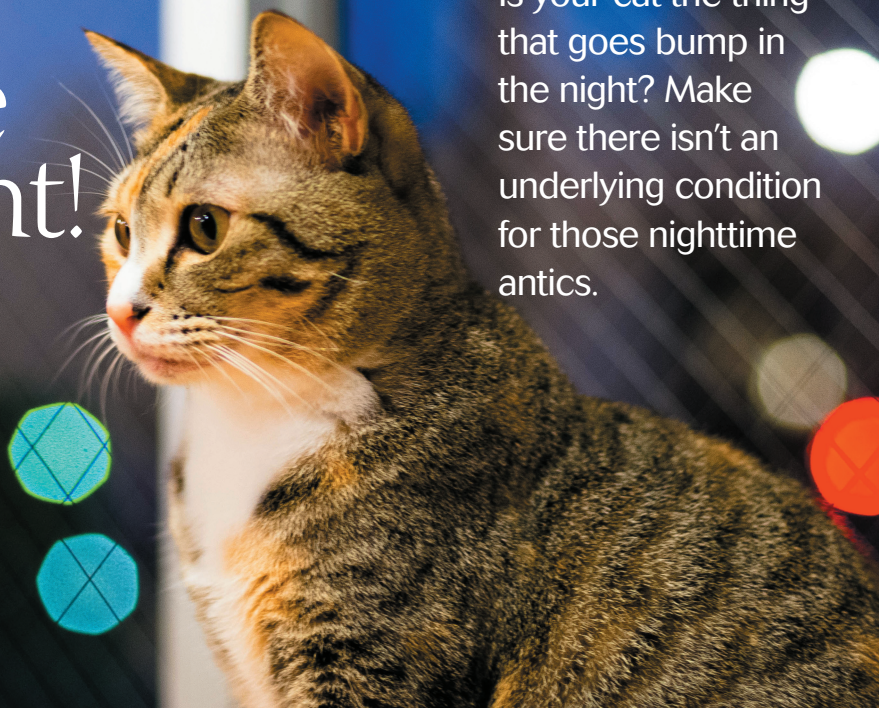


My cat keeps me up at night!

Yawwwnnnn

Is your cat the thing that goes bump in the night? Make sure there isn't an underlying condition for those nighttime antics.



People and cats have internal schedules that are not 100% synchronized. Cats like to ramp up activity in the early morning and at dusk because they are crepuscular (active at dawn and dusk). This tendency is inherited from their wild feline ancestors and is thought to be an adaption that makes cats most active when other dangerous predators (who are nocturnal) are not.

Just because it is an inclination for cats, however, does not mean that cat owners will never sleep a full night again. Schedules can be adapted and new tendencies developed. Before you attempt to train your cat to choose a new schedule, it is absolutely imperative that you make certain that her disturbing you is not due to pain or illness on her part.

Be sure that your cat is seeing your veterinarian regularly, regardless of whether or not she “seems” ill. Cats are masters at hiding disease because they are not extremely evolved from their wild predecessors and they in-

stinctively avoid flagging themselves as weak to avoid predation. All cats need to have a full veterinary exam at least once yearly.

Always remember that your tiny hunter is left at home with little to do while you are off doing human things. Your cat is wired to stalk and hunt and now that his food needs are met with no effort on his part, he is apt to lack mental and physical stimulation.

Prioritize play

Prioritize your cat or kitten's need to think and move. Make a daily habit of play time that involves stalking and apprehending. There are a variety of toys that make cats chase and pounce. A busy cat is more likely to sleep well and a happy cat is more likely to be calm, especially if you are (like when you are sleeping).

When play is done, feed your cat her regular meal, so she is not feeling driven to seek food from you. Then, help her gear down with some relaxing grooming and quiet time. When

it is time for bed, you might need to restrain her away from you so that you do not inadvertently reward her disruption. Even if all you do is grumble when your cat wakes you, she gets a reaction from you and that reaction might be enough to reward her behavior. Whatever you do, if you want to adjust your cat's wake time, do *not* get up to dump food in her bowl to quiet her. If you do, you are training her to continue the undesirable actions.

The most important thing to consider is that sometimes a cat's waking you or crying at night is due to illness or pain. Senior cats suffering from dementia, kidney disease and hyperthyroidism have all been reported to increase nighttime activity. Any cat that suddenly develops this habit must be evaluated by a veterinarian as soon as possible. All of your efforts to retrain bad habits will fail if an underlying medical condition exists and frustration will undermine your bond with your cat.

Source: Kathryn Primm, DVM