

Ask the vets+++

Have you got a question?

Send your questions to:

Ask The Vets, The Cat magazine, National Cat Centre,
Chelwood Gate, Haywards Heath, RH17 7TT or email
editorial@cats.org.uk

CP's team of veterinary experts tackle your feline-related questions...



Q Murphy is a black British shorthair, approximately 10 years old and a very happy cat who is not stressed. However he sometimes cries in the night. I adopted him over five years ago, but this is something that has only been happening intermittently over the last year and a half. There is no pattern to this; sometimes it is two consecutive nights, or it might be one night then nothing for weeks. The sound he makes sounds like a distressed noise and is not his normal miaow. When I go to see him sometimes he is asleep, other times he is content and purring when I get to him. The other week I got up and found him sitting up wide awake. There seems to be no pattern of the frequency of his crying, or his demeanour when I go to him.

Are you able to tell me the reason for his crying? Do you know if he is genuinely distressed and if I should do something? Should I go to him or ignore him? Recently I have tried to ignore him in case it is for attention, but sometimes he seems to do it in his sleep, so I am not sure if it is this.

Aimee Hamblin, via email

A We're sorry to hear that you're not getting a good night's sleep! With any change in behaviour or any behavioural problem, the first step is always to take the cat to your vet for a full health to rule out medical problems that could cause the behaviour. You haven't mentioned whether or not your cat is neutered as both male and female cats that haven't been neutered cry or call – however we would expect that if this were the case he would have been doing this since you first got him. Cats Protection recommend that cats are neutered as a humane way to help control the overpopulation of cats, as well as benefiting for various health and behavioural reasons. There are a number of medical conditions such as hyperthyroidism, cognitive dysfunction/ senility, pain, or loss of hearing to name just a few that can cause excessive vocalisation. Please specifically discuss the behaviour with the vet and ask them to rule out medical causes. It may be useful to video the behaviour (even just on a smart phone if you have one) to show the vet as different vocalisations can be hard to describe! It's also important to discuss the situations in which the crying occurs, what the cat's body language and facial expression is like and any other changes in the cat's behaviour that may have occurred recently (even if you think it is unrelated to the crying) such as sleeping more or less, hiding more or less, eating/drinking more or less, walking into a room and seeming to not remember why.

If Murphy gets a clean bill of health then there are a number of behavioural reasons that could cause excessive vocalisation. As a species, cats are generally crepuscular,

meaning that they are more active during dawn and dusk, especially as this is when their prey species are most active. Many owners are woken in the early hours of the morning as their cats are ready to start their day. To find out more about the natural feline behaviours and how our pet cats share ancestry and many behaviours with the African wildcat, why not check out our free e-learning course www.cats.org.uk/learn/e-learning-ufo. Another possibility for crying at night could include territorial vocalisations if they have spotted another cat in the area that they tend to see near the house at night. Some cats develop a variety of ways to get our attention, which can range from pawing our face to knocking objects off the side and vocalisation is a very effective way of getting us out of bed! If your vet feels that the problem could be behavioural, then we would recommend a referral to a qualified behaviourist such as a member of the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (APBC) – www.apbc.org.uk.

Q I have an ancient much-loved Siamese cat, Pearl, now 18 years old. She is in remarkable health and vigour for a cat her age, enjoying a mainly somnolent life with occasional forays into the garden in fine weather – no further, as she cannot manage fences or walls. The only problem I have with her is that she has spells of constipation, one or two days at a time, perhaps a couple of times a month. Since a bout of cystitis last September she has been fed exclusively on Hills Prescription diet k/d which she enjoys and drinks perhaps two to four fluid ounces of water per day. She weighs about nine pounds. Is there anything I can add to her food to relieve her occasional constipation, bearing in mind her age and kidney function, or is she OK as she is? (She never seems distressed in any way.) I would welcome your advice.

Mrs M Barton, Bristol

A Many thanks for your letter about your concerns over your cat Pearl. It is so lovely to hear of an older cat enjoying her life and she clearly has a very loving home with you. I am sorry to hear that she sometimes suffers from constipation.

Constipation can have different causes and so, unfortunately, we are unable to make any specific recommendations. Some cats which suffer from constipation benefit from being encouraged to drink more water, or by being given a wholly wet diet (you don't mention if you are feeding the dried or wet version of the kidney diet). You could also try watering the food down. Cats often drink more if their food and water bowl are separated from each other; others drink more if given more bowls around the

house – upstairs and downstairs – or if they are offered a range of types of bowl, such as ceramic or glass, in case plastic or metal adds a nasty taint the cat can taste. Some cats prefer dripping water or a water fountain. It is also important to consider how easily and comfortably your cat can reach a preferred toileting site – elderly cats can find the high sides of some litter trays a struggle and so delay accessing the tray which can lead to constipation. Others don't want to have to go outside to toilet if there is no tray inside, and some find the climb up and down stairs off-putting, so will delay going to the toilet. For some cats, offering more trays, ensuring they are easily accessible with low sides, in quiet locations on all floors of the house, away from other pets and noisy thoroughfares/appliances can be helpful. Soft, fine litter can also be more comfortable than large hard substrates for cats, especially those with creaking joints – if considering a change of litter, gradually add in a new litter to the old making the change slowly over a week or two to avoid toileting accidents, and avoid scented litters which some cats don't like. Make sure she has access to cosy comfortable resting areas and add steps/stools so she can easily get up to and down from favoured perches, which may help encourage her to make more frequent toilet trips. Cats which have constipation because of lots of hair inadvertently consumed can benefit from additional gentle grooming. For some cats, stool softeners or lubricants prescribed by your vet can be helpful. For others, anti-inflammatory treatment to aid arthritis can enable more frequent trips to the tray which may avoid constipation. The best thing to do would be to talk to your vet about your concerns and they can guide you on whether any medication is necessary and give you specific advice tailored to Pearl's needs – it is important to make any changes gradually as Pearl will be very used to the way her life is now and may find sudden changes distressing.

Q I often read about cats in other countries needing new homes and that sometimes it's possible for them to be adopted by someone in the UK. Do you think this is a good idea?

John Bennett, Didcot, Oxon

A Many cats find the experience of being adopted from overseas and transported over long distances very stressful and some may be at risk of carrying exotic diseases which not only affect them as individuals but may be transmitted to resident UK cats. Each year a number of cats that were adopted overseas are brought to Cats Protection because of their failure to adjust to a new home, climate and environment.

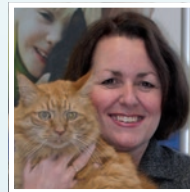
As an example, one of our branches in the south of England recently took in a cat that had been provided to a family by an overseas cat rescue organisation. The owners had sold the cat on soon after receiving it. The next owner kept the cat for six weeks and brought the cat to us for adoption as it wasn't settling well as an indoor pet.

Cats Protection does not put healthy cats to sleep and tries its best to find each one a suitable home, but unwanted cats from overseas add to the thousands of cats that we are already looking after that are in desperate need of a home.

We would encourage anyone thinking of adopting a cat to consider adopting from their local Cats Protection. Owners adopting from us have the peace of mind that their cat has been examined by a veterinary surgeon, microchipped, vaccinated, neutered if old enough and comes with four weeks' free insurance.

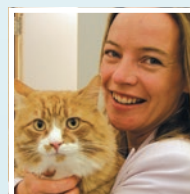
We understand that many animal lovers are affected by the plight of animals abroad, particularly when they go on holiday and witness first-hand the poor conditions that some of these animals are in and naturally they want to do something to assist them. The best way to help the greatest number of these animals is to support organisations that are carrying out work locally such as neutering programmes and education. These are the most effective ways of improving animal welfare in the longer term.

THE EXPERTS



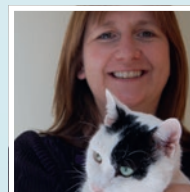
Maggie Roberts BVM&S MRCVS

After qualifying at Edinburgh University in 1986, Maggie went on to work primarily in private practice. Maggie first worked for CP as Veterinary Officer from 1997-99; her interest in feline medicine brought her back to the charity as Director of Veterinary Services in 2006. She has three cats, Trevor, Frankie and Ronnie.



Beth Skillings BVSc MRCVS

Beth qualified at the University of Liverpool in 1998 and went on to work in general veterinary practice until 2005 when she joined CP as Head of Veterinary Services. Beth moved into a new role as Clinical Veterinary Officer in November 2006. Beth has a CP cat, Humphrey.



Lisa Morrow BMLSc, DVM, MSc (Vet Epi) MRCVS

Lisa graduated from the Ontario Veterinary College at the University of Guelph, Canada in 2000. Lisa first worked with CP as an Adoption Centre Vet at Derby Adoption Centre and was CP Head of Veterinary Services from 2003-2005. Lisa recently rejoined CP as Field Veterinary Officer in the northern region of the UK. She has two black cats, Kiwi and Mango.



Karen Hiestand BVSc MRCVS

Karen graduated from Massey University in New Zealand in 2001 and spent two years in mixed practice in her home country. Since then, she has interspersed locumming around the UK with volunteer veterinary work. Karen is the Field Veterinary Officer for the southern region of the UK. She has one cat called Dexter.

Our veterinary surgeons have provided the advice on these pages, but for specific cases and health concerns it is important that you consult your own vet who will be able to look at your cat's history and do a clinical examination.