

Cat naps

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Sleep is an important state that many of us take for granted – but anyone who has suffered from sleep disorders will know how debilitating these conditions can be, causing both emotional and physical fatigue. Sleep is also important for our feline friends – they are a species renowned for their hours of idle slumber! But cats can suffer from sleep deprivation too and it is important they are given enough opportunity to recharge their batteries to help them live happy and healthy lives.

On average cats sleep 16 hours or more each day. While humans may sleep in marathon eight hour – or longer – sessions, cats sleep more frequently, napping intermittently throughout the day. Habits vary between cats but very old and very young kittens sleep more than robust adults. Sleep time increases on cold, rainy or cloudy days. Indoor cats may sleep more out of boredom but you can help by providing stimulation during the day. (See our *Indoor and outdoor cats* leaflet, more details at the end of this article.)

To sleep, perchance to dream

There are two basic phases of sleep: rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, when dreams may occur and non-REM sleep. When a cat is in REM sleep, the cat's whiskers, ears and tail may twitch and breathing patterns change. If feline dreams are anything like ours, then it's likely that their dreams contain jumbled imagery of their previous experiences.

Newborn kittens sleep most of the time. This pattern may have developed in their wild ancestors – as a sleeping and therefore quiet kitten is a safe kitten that won't attract predators. It is important not to disturb sleeping cats and this is especially so with kittens, for whom ample sleep is important for normal growth and development. As young cats mature their sleep patterns begin to conform to those of adults.

While cats often rotate their sleeping area – thought to be another evolutionary throwback from their wild counterparts, as a means of external parasite control – changes to sleep patterns may indicate illness. In older cats increased time spent sleeping, or sleeping in different – easier to access – sites may indicate that the cat is suffering with arthritis with its favoured places being too hard to reach.

During sleep, the cat's body and immune system repairs and regenerates itself. If a cat is deprived of sleep it can become confused and irritable. Ultimately the immune system will be adversely affected and the cat will be less able to fight off infections, so plenty of sleep is very important. Indeed inhibition of sleep is sometimes used as a measure of welfare in feline studies, with longer periods of REM sleep being an indicator of better sleep quality.

Faking it

There are many causes of stress in cats and it can affect their sleeping behaviour – cats will actually feign sleep when they are stressed. This commonly occurs in cats that have to share their resources with other cats they do not perceive to be in the same social group. So for example, cats that do not like each other may sleep near to each other on the back of a sofa because of the value of this lovely raised resting area, perhaps bathed in sunlight – but they may not actually relax properly because of the presence of the other cat nearby. As a result the cats may suffer from insufficient restful sleep which can be very debilitating.

Signs of feline stress are not obvious and it can be difficult to distinguish between feigned sleep and real sleep. This can be a dilemma for volunteers and staff working with rescue cats, which may also be stressed as a result of the change of environment and routine.

Signs to look out for include watching to see if the cat's ears move as though they are listening, and/or lying in sternal recumbency or the crouch position, and any changes in their behaviour such as irritability. Cats that curl up to sleep touching each other and that engage in mutual grooming behaviour are likely to be in the same social group – and not suffer from similar stress as a result of each other's company. But it is always important to provide enough different places to rest for all the cats which share a home.

Night-time activity

Cats tend to sleep at different times to people. They are crepuscular – generally alert and active at dawn and dusk when their natural prey would be active. This can sometimes cause problems to people sharing their cat's homes – not many people enjoy being woken up at 5am each morning! Increased feline activity at night may also result from medical disorders – commonly those causing pain (such as arthritis), hyperthyroidism, hypertension (high blood pressure) and



cognitive degeneration (senility) can change behaviour, increase nocturnal activity and may be accompanied by excessive vocalisation – which is also a feature of deafness.

Seeking veterinary advice to rule out medical problems is always the first step for cats with disrupted sleep patterns or changed behaviour. Increased nocturnal activity can also result from boredom or habit – getting up and in some way interacting with your cat, such as to feed it, let it out, or shut it out of the bedroom may inadvertently be reinforcing that behaviour. If your cat is showing any of these signs and your vet has ruled out medical problems, then you could contact a qualified behaviourist such as a member of the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors – www.apbc.org.uk

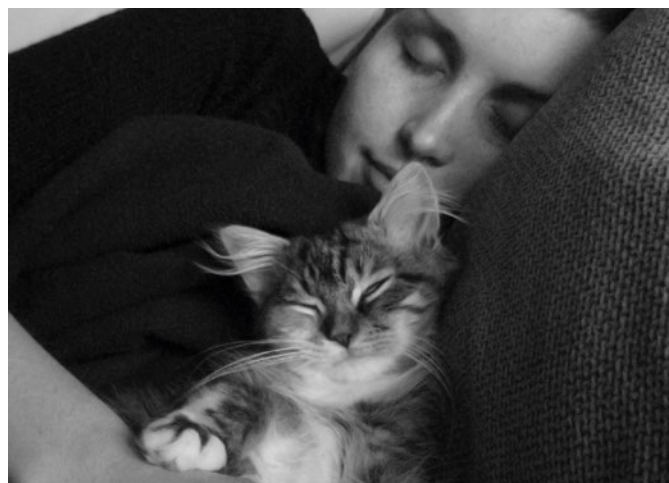
Why does the cat on my lap bite me?

When a cat falls asleep on our lap, we often don't realise they've drifted off and continue to stroke them. Most cats that are woken suddenly by their owner stroking them will realise what is happening. However others can feel understandably sleepy and disorientated and may react defensively to a perceived threat. If your cat is resting on your lap, it's best to stop stroking him so that he can sleep peacefully.



Help your cat get restful sleep

- As cats rotate their preferred sleeping location, provide them with a variety of different places around the house to sleep
- When positioning the beds bear in mind cats like to sleep in high places where they feel safe and secure
- Provide warm places at ambient temperature which are dry and draught-proof
- Provide places where a cat is unlikely to be disturbed
- Provide age and health-appropriate sleeping areas that can be easily accessed by the small, weak or old – preferably still enabling them to safely reach raised locations
- Cats often prefer to sleep on soft fleecy textured beds with high sides
- It's helpful to provide beds with covers that are easily washed and dried
- Don't wash or replace all beds at once – cats like familiar scents so wash the bed when it's dirty, but otherwise leave the reassuring scents behind



- Provide plenty of beds in different locations, especially for cats in multi-cat households
- Place the beds away from resources such as the litter tray, food or water
- Cats often scratch after a period of sleep so it may be useful to place a scratching post near a favourite bed
- Stimulate your cat during the day – let it play outside and play with fishing rod-style toys indoors
- Make your home a sanctuary for both you and your cat – check our essential guides *Caring for your cat* and *Understanding your cat's behaviour* for helpful tips on helping your cat make the most of your home. The essential guide *Indoor and outdoor cats* has additional ideas for cats kept solely indoors

Cats thrive on routine and can be understandably unsettled during times of change. Change of location, such as a cattery stay, moving house, a stay at the vets or building work are situations that require a bit of careful thought on our part to minimise the stress to our feline friends. You can take additional steps during times of disruption to help your cat to snooze peacefully using the check list above in conjunction with a synthetic facial pheromone such as Feliway® to help reduce stress.

A sleeping cat is such a familiar sight to cat owners and they make sleeping look like an art, however delve a little deeper and their sleeping habits are fascinating. By looking at African wildcat behaviour, we can start to understand why we see some of these behaviours in our pet cats – such as rotating their sleeping places regularly. This insight can provide relief for frustrated owners that don't understand why their cat is no longer sleeping on the newly bought cat bed. (For owners in this situation, try relocating the bed to another position that is higher up, quiet and in a warm, sunny spot.)

By improving our understanding of cats and the behaviour the cat has developed to enable it to thrive in a changing world, we can learn how to best provide for our cats, meet their species-specific needs, maximise their welfare and ensure long-lasting friendships for happy cats and owners. ●

To download the leaflets mentioned, and many more, visit www.cats.org.uk/cat-care/care-leaflets/essential-guides or for paper copies call our Helpline on 03000 12 12 12.