

## **Getting A Good Night's Sleep With Your Nocturnally Active Cat**

### **The Natural Behavior of Cats**

Like most New Yorkers I keep late work hours, so when I arrive home the only thing on my mind is my fluffy pillow. Instead I'm greeted by four sets of glossy eyes staring at me, waiting to be fed. No problem. After a hearty meal and a bit of grooming, three sets of eyes disperse, however the owner of the other set, instead of eating, starts darting back and forth across the floor. Yahoo! It's playtime. Sometimes this feisty kitty, my darling Lil' Pete, will grab a toy mouse and toss it under a piece of furniture in anticipation of me going to get it for him (he's trained me well!). I certainly can't be annoyed; after all I haven't been home all day so he's had plenty of napping. He may have played a bit with his feline companions, but I'm so much more fun. Actually, even if I were home he would still probably sleep all day. Cats are nocturnal by nature, and have historically followed a crepuscular hunting schedule, meaning that they are most active at dawn and dusk. Their sense of sight is highly specialized for this: they have a tapetum lucidum, a mirror-like structure that reflects light back to the rods in their retinas (parts of the eye that contribute to vision). They can see in 1/6<sup>th</sup> the amount of light needed by a human to see. Although they can't see in extreme darkness, they can see movements and objects in semidarkness that would otherwise be invisible to humans. It's no wonder they're so active at night and we're not!

### **Keep Your Cat Busy While You're At Work**

There are a number of ways you can keep your cat busy during the day so he'll be less active and sleepier at night. Provide your cat with toys that can be swatted around on his own: toy mice are especially fun for this. Some even come laced with catnip. Rotate these toys frequently because cats, like people, become bored with the same old thing day after day. You can also purchase squeaking mouse toys that hang on an elastic string from your door. Cats love to bat at these. To freshen these toys, periodically dip them in a bag of catnip. Your cat will think they're new.

There are great interactive videos your cat can watch during the day, such as Video Catnip, by Pet-AVision Inc. Before leaving the house set up your VCR to go on at a certain time, say mid-afternoon. If your cat likes the viewing, he'll sit in front of the TV and be entertained by larger-than-life birds flying and squirrels running across the screen. Put a seat in front of the TV so the picture is at the cat's eye level and he can try to "catch" these elusive critters.

Panic Mouse is yet another great interactive toy. A fuzzy soft ball dangles from a battery-operated wand that swings the ball around at a variety of adjustable speeds and at different angles. You can turn it on when you leave your home and it will go for hours! Another model of this toy comes with a digital timer that you can set to run for 15 minutes to 2 hours.

For a less expensive alternative, paper bags can be loads of fun. Cats love to charge into opened paper bags. You can make them especially appealing by throwing a few fuzzy mice inside or by sprinkling a teaspoonful of catnip in the bottom.

Another great idea for occupying your cat is to install a bird feeder outside of your window. Place a cat perch on the windowsill and voilà, reality TV!!! There's no greater pleasure than to watch *real* birds up close and personal.

### **Things To Do When You Get Home**

Yes, you're tired, but it's for your cat's benefit, as well for the benefit of those deep circles under your eyes, to spend 15 minutes playing with your cat. Lil' Pete loves being chased around the house. It only takes five minutes out of my evening and he's pooped! He also loves when I toss his toy mouse for him to swat. He leaps into the air, à la Michael Jordan, and lobs the mouse through the air. You can also use cat dancers and kitty teasers that mimic the movement of mice and birds. Lil' Pete is extremely affectionate and enjoys being held, so for the last five minutes of quality time, I scoop him in my arms for a quick cuddle. We rub faces, and I give him a soothing belly rub. Not all cats like this, but for those who do it's a nice way to calm down from a play session. Then, to really get him sleepy, I end the evening with Lil' Pete's main meal. Cats are highly likely to sleep after a big meal.

### **What To Do If Your Cat Wakes You During the Night to Play**

Some cats need to be locked out of the bedroom because they may nip at your toes moving or swat at your eyelids twitching while you sleep. If your cat cries and scratches at the door, you can discourage him by placing something he dislikes in front of the door, such as vinyl carpet-runner (placed upside-down to expose the knobby side) or double-sided sticky tape. If your typically well-behaved cat suddenly starts wandering restlessly at night, crying or needing to eat more, there may be an underlying medical concern, such as an overactive thyroid (hyperthyroidism) that is easily controlled with medication. Have him checked out by your veterinarian. Excessive nocturnal crying can also be due to age-related deficits, such as a loss of hearing, vision, or sense of smell. Try moving your cat's food and water dish near his bed and put his litter box along an easily followed path. Letting the cat sleep near you may be comforting to you both.

If your cat wakes you up during the night to be fed, try an automatic feeder with a built-in timer to dispense food according to a preset schedule. Set it to open once or twice during the night. Your cat should learn to wait by the feeder rather than bother you. Feeding several small meals during the day may also help curtail your cat's excessive nocturnal appetite. Save the largest meal for right before bedtime. Bon nuit!