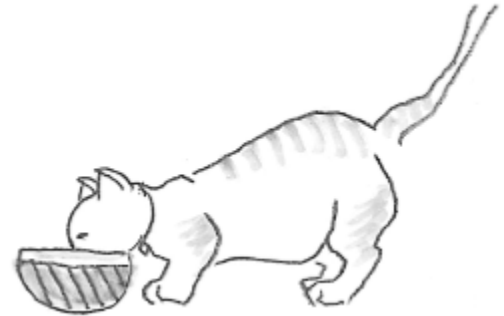


## Early Morning Feline Antics

**How does the early morning scenario go down?** It's 5 am and your cat jumps on your head, pounces at your feet and meows dramatically in your face. You throw your pillow over your head, grumble and yell at your cat and then eventually succumb and get up to feed the cat so you can go back to bed. Congratulations! You have just rewarded your cat for this morning routine and have made it **more likely** it will happen on a daily basis.

**Why does your cat do it?** It is a rewarding behavior. By waking you up, your cat achieves certain goals:

- He has made something exciting happen, even if it is only grumbling or movement
- He receives social interaction, no matter how you respond
- He gets fed

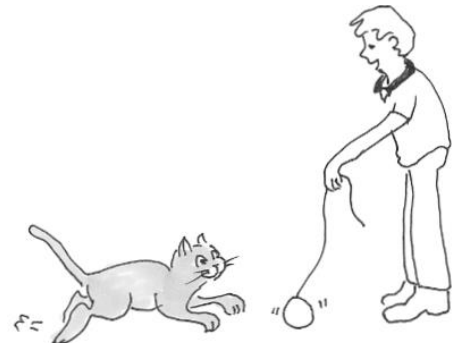


Cats are genetically programmed to hunt at dawn and dusk and this behavior can lead to higher levels of activity and play during those hours. It is important to remember that as far as the cat is concerned these behaviors are normal. Also you cannot blame the early morning romps and demands for food entirely on their biological clocks - if your cat is bored and sleeps all day while you are gone then he is going to be active at night and up early in the morning.

**So what can you do?** Contrary to popular belief, cats can be trained. They can adjust their biological clocks to our routines with your help. Consider those nighttime and early morning feline antics your cat's cry for more--more exercise, mental stimulation and environmental stimulation. In an effort to keep our cats safe and inside, we have forgotten just how much stimulation they miss from being outside. That lack of stimulation is at the root of many behavioral issues concerning our feline friends. So, what can you do?

### ***Establish a Routine:***

- **Morning:** When you get up, do not feed your cat first thing in the morning. Feeding a cat first thing in the morning will only encourage him to start waking you up even earlier because he associates you getting up with food. To discourage this, establish a routine of making coffee, taking a shower--whatever does not involve feeding him first. You can play with him for a few minutes after your routine, then feed him.
- **Evening:** Play with him and give him wet food about an hour before bedtime. You can split dinner and give half before bedtime. This is essential for a good night's sleep for you both. **Exercise him during the day:** Use interactive toys (this is also important bonding time with you) to engage him and tire him out. He needs at least two or more 30-minute play sessions with you. See if you can get him panting tired!
- **Mental & environmental stimulation:** Keep your cat stimulated even when you are gone for the day. Rotate his toys, set up a bird feeder outside the window, leave a cardboard box out with toys in it, use food puzzles, and cat nip. Come to Marin



Humane's Feline [Environment Enrichment workshop](#) and review the [Environmental Enrichment handout](#) for more ideas.

- **Pick up toys at night:** He will be tempted to play. He will be more likely to sleep if there are no jingle balls to bat around.
- **Rewarding behavior:** Only reward behavior that you would like to see repeated. Remember, reinforcement drives behavior. Ignore behavior you don't like. If you do not want him sleeping on your head--never pet him when he is there. Place him where you want him to be and pet him there.
- **Entice him:** To get him sleeping on a more appropriate location on the bed, provide a second pillow, cozy fleece bed or a pet-safe warmed bed.
- **Never punish your cat:** Remember these are natural behaviors. Physical punishment, throwing things, even squirt bottles or yelling can destroy the human-animal bond. Cats that are motivated to play and are being punished for trying to play may become conflicted and aggressive.



**Tips to Help You Sleep Through the Night (while implementing all of the above):** If you choose to sleep alone, you **MUST** enforce your choice by **NOT** rewarding your cat'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 knocking, he will try even harder the next time you don't feel like opening it. Intermittent reinforcement is the strongest form of reinforcement.

- Place a fan outside the bedroom door blowing outward as a deterrent
- Use double sided sticky tape on bedroom door as a deterrent
- Wear ear plugs
- Use a white noise machine
- Install room darkening shades (sunlight can trigger activity)
- For the extreme morning riser—Use an automatic feeder in the kitchen with set times for food release.
- Avoid punishing your cat

**Senior Cat Health Note:** Senior cats that have shifts in their sleep cycles, that are vocalizing loudly, or have changes in vision and/or hearing may be experiencing a decline in cognitive abilities and should be seen by a veterinarian. There also may be other medical reasons if your cat suddenly develops irritating nighttime habits--including but not limited to pain, hyperthyroidism and infection.

### Feline Resources:

We are here to help! Marin Humane's [Behavior & Training](#) department conducts various [cat workshops](#). Sign up on our [Cat Behavior Workshops](#) page for the next available topic. We also have Cat Behavior Consultants who are available for private training or [consultations](#) (phone, online or in-home) at 415.506.6284 or [MarinHumane.org/oh-behave/cats/](http://MarinHumane.org/oh-behave/cats/).