



# Paw Prints

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Columnist

## Does your cat keep you up all night?

You toss and turn and finally get to sleep, when suddenly a pain in your big toe wakes you up. Your 10-pound tabby attacks your foot and then jumps on your chest, purring all the while.

And if you're like most pet parents, you end up giving in to Kitty's nighttime shenanigans by giving her attention.

Giving in to her will create a never-ending cycle of not getting a good night's sleep.

Cats are crepuscular, meaning they are active at dawn and dusk. Cats in the wild hunt during the night, and domestic cats retain this tendency to be "night owls." That may be why they need

such good night vision. Their eyes have six to eight times more rod cells, which are more sensitive to low light, than humans do.

Your feline friend's good night vision also allows her to sense motion in the dark much better than her human pet parent. So if your toes wiggle when you are asleep dreaming of a warm beach ... well what do you expect from a crepuscular cat that needs a schedule change?

If your cat is keeping you awake at night, here are some common reasons why:

The first thing to do is rule out any medical problems. If your cat is meowing more at night while you're trying to sleep, it could be caused by pain or discomfort. Kitty may be uncomfortable during the day also, but if you're not there, who's to notice?

Once you've ruled out any medical issues, the most common reason for her behavior is usually because your cat has the most energy at night — particularly if you're at work all day. She's bored.

When you're working, Kitty spends her entire day napping. Then when you get home, her day begins. You feed her dinner and play with her for a while. By the middle of the night she's hitting her stride and is at her most

rambunctious.

Recent research on cat behavior at night shows that even cats that have developed sleep patterns similar to humans still wake several times during the night. Once Kitty is awake, she shifts into play mode, leaping at every movement you make, trying to entice you to play.

Simply locking Kitty out of the bedroom at night is not always effective. She may yowl and pound at the door to be let back in. The best solution is to increase her activity level during the day so that your furry friend sleeps more at night.

The goal is to get Kitty to be more active during the day so her energy level will be lower when you are trying to sleep. This may be difficult to do if you are gone most of the day. Try one-on-one playtime before and after work, which promotes exercise for kitty. Exercise is a great way for your cat to release energy and stress. Some toys that cats love to chase are little fur mice, feathers on a string, laser pointers, waded up paper balls — the possibilities are endless. Playing with Kitty long enough will tire her out before bedtime. The more energy she burns during the day, the less there will be to keep you awake at night.



PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER MCNAMEE

Kitty is on a new schedule and is active during the day watching birds outside the window.

Try walking Kitty on a harness before and after work. It may take awhile to get her used to the harness, but it's a great way for her to get some exercise.

Set up a cat perch or a cat tree next to a window where she can watch the outside world during the day to keep occupied. To make it even more exciting for her, put a bird feeder just outside to attract birds.

It's easier said than done, but if your feline friend is in the habit of waking you up every night, ignore the attention-seeking, high-energy behavior when it happens. If you feed your cat or pet her

when she's causing chaos at night, she will learn that running over your bed meowing and batting at your feet will give her exactly what she wants.

Regulate mealtime by having a set time for breakfast and dinner. Cats, like most animals, love predictability and routine, so get her use to "play, then eat." Feeding Kitty a larger portion of her food at bedtime may also help your cat sleep at night.

Give these changes a good couple of weeks to take hold and you will hopefully soon find yourself sleeping during the night again!

# Quilt Drawing

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"Friends of Furry Friends" - by Valerie Fercho-Tillery (46"w x 59"h)