

# Common Cat Behavior Issues

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## Meowing and Yowling



The cat's meow is her way of communicating with people. Cats meow for many reasons—to say hello, to ask for things, and to tell us when something's wrong. Meowing is an interesting vocalization in that adult cats don't actually meow at each other, just at people. Kittens meow to let their mother know they're cold or hungry, but once they get a bit older, cats no longer meow to other cats. But they continue to meow to people throughout their lives, probably because meowing gets people to do what they want. Cats also yowl—a sound similar to the meow but more drawn out and melodic. Unlike meowing, adult cats do yowl at one another, specifically during breeding season.

When does meowing become excessive? That's a tough call to make, as it's really a personal issue. All cats are going to meow to some extent—this is normal communication behavior. But some cats meow more than their pet parents would like. Bear in mind that some breeds of cats, notably the Siamese, are prone to excessive meowing and yowling.



## Why Cats Meow

These are the most common reasons why cats meow:

- **To greet people.** Your cat can be expected to meow in greeting when you come home, when she meets up with you in the house and when you speak to her.
- **To solicit attention.** Cats enjoy social contact with people, and some will be quite vocal in their requests for attention. The cat may want to be stroked, played with or simply talked to. Cats who are left alone for long periods of time each day may be more likely to meow for attention.
- **To ask for food.** Most cats like to eat, and they can be quite demanding around mealtimes. Some cats learn to meow whenever anyone enters the kitchen, just in case food might be forthcoming. Others meow to wake you up to serve them breakfast. Cats also learn to beg for human food by meowing.
- **To ask to be let in or out.** Meowing is the cat's primary way to let you know what she wants. If she wants to go outside, she'll likely learn to meow at the door. Likewise, if she's outdoors and wants in, she'll meow to get you to let her back inside. If you're trying to transition a cat from being indoor-outdoor to living exclusively indoors, you may be in for a period of incessant meowing at doors and windows. This is a difficult change for a cat to make, and it will very likely take weeks or even months for the meowing to stop.
- **Elderly cats** suffering from mental confusion, or cognitive dysfunction, may meow if they become disoriented—a frequent symptom of this feline version of Alzheimer's Disease. For more information, please read our article on [Behavior Problems in Older Cats \(/pet-care/cat-care/common-cat-behavior-issues/older-cats-behavior-problems\)](/pet-care/cat-care/common-cat-behavior-issues/older-cats-behavior-problems).
- **To find a mate.** Reproductively intact cats are more likely to yowl. Females yowl to advertise their receptivity to males, and males yowl to gain access to females.

## Take Your Cat to the Veterinarian

A cat who meows a lot should be checked thoroughly by a veterinarian to ensure a medical condition is not the cause of the cat's distress. Numerous diseases can

cause cats to feel unusually hungry, thirsty, restless or irritable—any of which is likely to prompt meowing. Even if your cat has a history of meowing for food, you should still have her checked by your veterinarian. As cats age, they're prone to developing an overactive thyroid and kidney disease, and either one may result in excessive meowing.

## **Helping Your Cat Be Less Vocal**

Before you try to curb your cat's excessive vocalizing, you need to determine the cause. Look at the circumstances around her meowing and make note of what seems to get her to stop. It may help to keep a log book so you can look for any patterns in when she becomes especially vocal. Once you identify when she's likely to meow excessively, try these suggestions to help her control her vocalizations:

- If your cat meows to say hello, it's unlikely that you'll be able to do much to change things—you have an especially vocal cat who is telling you how glad she is to see you!
- If your cat is meowing for attention, teach her that you'll only pay attention to her when she's quiet. Resist the urge to shout at her or give her any form of attention, even angry attention. Instead, be patient and wait for a brief moment of silence. Immediately give her the attention she craves. If she starts to meow again, walk away, and only return to her when she's quiet. If you're consistent, she will catch on.
- If you believe your cat cries out of loneliness because you spend too much time out of the house, consider having a pet sitter come partway through the day to visit and play with her.
- If your cat meows at you for food, stop feeding her when she cries! Feed her at prescribed times so she learns that it's futile to ask for food at other times. If that doesn't work, buy an automatic feeder that you can schedule to open at specific times. At least then she's more likely to meow at the feeder than at you! This is especially useful if your cat wakes you up in the morning to be fed—she'll switch from bothering you to sitting and watching the feeder, waiting for it to open.
- If you've recently placed your cat on a diet, consult with your veterinarian about high-fiber diet foods or supplements that can help your cat feel satisfied

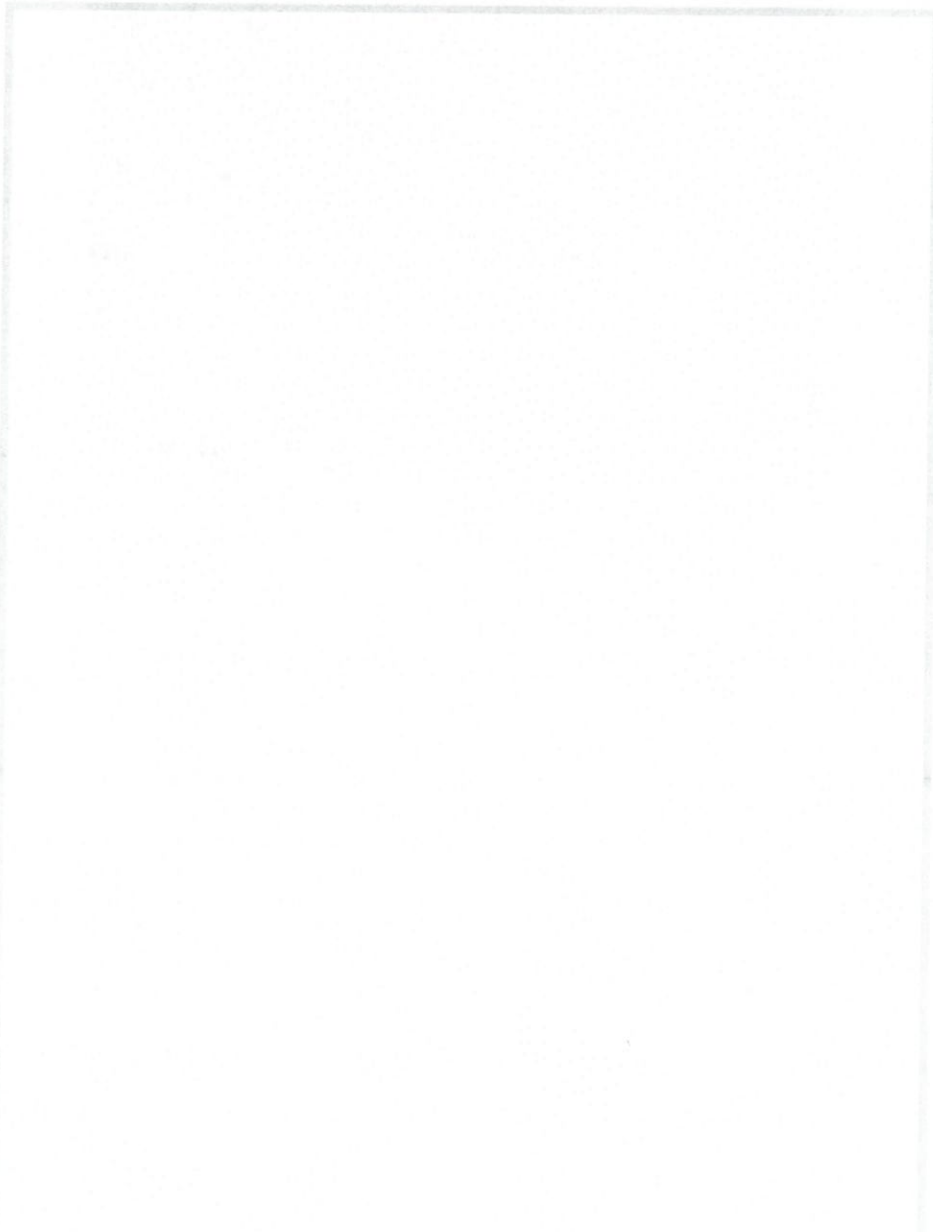


with her reduced intake.

- If your cat isn't prone to gaining weight, consider leaving dry food out for her all the time so she never has to feel hungry. If you feed a high-fiber diet food, your cat can feel full without taking in too many calories. Check with your veterinarian before trying this.
- If your cat is meowing to get you to let her inside/outside, consider installing a cat door so you don't have to serve as her butler. The ASPCA recommends that cats be kept exclusively indoors to protect them from danger and disease. If you have a cat who's accustomed to going outside and you want to keep her in, she's likely to go through a period of meowing at doors and windows. There's no easy way to get through this, but as long as she never gets outside again, she will eventually adjust to her life indoors and stop meowing so much. Another option is to build an outdoor cat enclosure so she can spend time outside but remain safe.
- If your female cat isn't spayed and she periodically meows excessively, she may be in heat at those times. Female cats in heat typically become increasingly affectionate, rub against you more, purr, roll around on the floor—and meow a lot. This lasts four to ten days. An unsprayed female cat who isn't bred by (doesn't have sex with) a male cat will continue to come into heat every 18 to 24 days throughout the breeding season (roughly February through September in the Northern Hemisphere). Indoor cats may continue to come into heat all year round. The best way to reduce excessive meowing caused by the heat cycle is to have your cat spayed.
- If your male cat isn't neutered and he periodically meows excessively, he may be hearing or smelling a female cat in heat. He is likely to pace and meow relentlessly throughout the time the female stays in heat. Unless you can completely prevent him from being able to detect females in heat, the best way to reduce excessive meowing in an intact male cat is to have him neutered.
- If your cat is elderly and has just started meowing excessively, make sure to have her evaluated by your veterinarian for medical conditions, sensory deficits and cognitive dysfunction. Medication may alleviate her discomfort.

## **What NOT to Do**

- Do not ignore your cat when she meows. The one exception is if you know for certain that she's meowing to get you to do something she wants. In every other instance, it's safest to assume that something's wrong—she may not have access to her litter box, or her water bowl may be empty, or she may be locked in a closet. Always make sure that her needs are met before assuming that she's just being demanding by meowing at you.
- Do not scold or hit your cat for meowing too much. While these punishments may send her scurrying at first, they are unlikely to have a lasting effect on her meowing behavior. They may, however, cause her to become fearful of you.







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