

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 because 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. Although they don't meow, adult cats do yowl at one another, specifically during the 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 incessantly and drive their pet parents crazy! Bear in mind that some cat breeds, 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** You can expect your cat to meow in greeting when you come home, when she meets up with you in the house or yard, and when you speak to her.
- **To get attention** Cats enjoy social contact with people, and some will be quite vocal in their requests for attention. Your cat might want you to stroke her, play with her or simply talk to her. 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 downright demanding around mealtimes. Some cats learn to meow whenever anyone enters the kitchen, just in case food might be forthcoming. Others meow to wake people 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 your 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 to come in, she'll meow to get you to let her back inside. If you're trying to transition a cat from an indoor-outdoor life 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.
- **To find a mate** Unspayed and unneutered cats are more likely to yowl. Females yowl to advertise their sexual receptivity to males, and males yowl to gain access to females.
- **Cognitive dysfunction** 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](#).

Take Your Cat to the Veterinarian

A cat who meows a lot should be thoroughly examined by a veterinarian to make sure that 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 her 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 Quiet Down

Before you try to curb your cat's excessive vocalizing, you need to determine its 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 your cat's behavior. Does she consistently start to vocalize at a particular time or in a specific place? Once you identify when your cat is 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 just happen to have an especially vocal cat who's telling you how glad she is to see you!
- If your cat meows for attention, teach her that you'll only pay attention to her when she's quiet. Whenever she starts to make noise, 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. As soon as it comes, immediately give your cat 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'll eventually 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. Please see our article on [Enriching Your Cat's Life](#) for other ways to keep your cat entertained while you're away.
- If your cat meows at you for food, stop feeding her when she cries! Feed her at strictly scheduled 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 set to open at specific times. At least your cat will be more likely to meow at the feeder than at you! An automatic feeder is especially useful if your cat wakes you up early in the morning to be fed. If you use a feeder, she'll switch from bothering you to sitting and watching it, waiting for it to open. To learn about other ways to deal with a cat who's active in the early hours of the morning, please see our article on [Nighttime Activity in Cats](#).
- If you've recently placed your cat on a diet, speak 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 meows to get you to let her inside or outside, consider installing a cat door so you don't have to serve as her butler. Another solution is to change your cat's lifestyle. The ASPCA recommends that cats live 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 your cat never gets outside again, she'll eventually adjust to her life indoors and stop meowing so much. Please read our article on [Enriching Your Cat's Life](#) to learn how to keep your cat happy by enriching her indoor world. You can also build an outdoor cat enclosure so your cat can spend time outside but remain safe. Please see our article on [Preventing Your Cat from Getting Outside](#) for more information on this subject.
- 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 vocalize *a lot*. This kind of behavior lasts 4 to 10 days. An unspayed female cat who doesn't mate 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 female cats in heat. He's likely to pace and meow relentlessly throughout the time a nearby female stays in heat. Unless you can completely prevent him from being able to detect

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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, be sure to have her evaluated by your veterinarian for medical conditions, sensory deficits, such as loss of hearing or eyesight, and cognitive dysfunction. Medication may alleviate her discomfort.

What NOT to Do

- Do not ignore your cat when she meows—unless 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. Your cat may not have access to her litter box, her water bowl may be empty or she may be locked in a closet. Always make sure that your cat’s 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.