

## Excessive Vocalization

If your cat is meowing more than you think is normal (or at inappropriate times), no doubt you are at your wits' end. There are several potential reasons this might be happening – an underlying medical issue, attempts to attract sexual partners, or because they have learned that this behaviour gets them what they want (your attention, food, access outside, etc.).

### Visit your veterinarian

As with most behaviour concerns, it is always wise to begin with a trip to your veterinarian. This is especially true with excessive vocalizations if they sound negative, are accompanied by postures/behaviours suggestive of pain, or if the frequency/urgency has increased suddenly. Even if your cat's behaviour does not meet this description, your veterinarian may still run tests to rule out chronic underlying conditions. If your cat is intact, spaying or neutering can dramatically reduce vocalizations (as well as a host of other behavioural and medical conditions). Speak to your veterinarian about this during your visit as well.



### What to do (and not to do) when they are meowing

If no medical cause is found, it is likely that your cat is meowing because they have learned that it gets them what they want. If they meow at you incessantly at 5 am until you get up and feed them, they learn that meowing gets them food. Your behaviour has strengthened their likelihood of meowing for food in the future. In situations like the one described, it can be very difficult to avoid the temptation to cave in to their demands, but here is a list of “Dos” and “Don'ts” to help guide your behaviour when you are enduring an episode of excessive vocalizations:

#### **DO:**

- **Ignore.** This can be very difficult but is essential for success. Try closing a door between you and your cat during these bouts, and turn on a white noise machine.
- **Click for quiet.** “Click for quiet” can be a good way to reduce incessant meowing. Essentially you “mark” the silence between meows (with a clicker), and then give your cat a treat. Gradually you increase the amount of time between meows until there is a significant reduction in vocalizations. Here is a video of the technique in action: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSwUw9DiT6A>.

#### **DON'T:**

- **Punish.** It is very important not to punish this behaviour – this is unlikely to have the desired impact, and may only serve to damage your relationship. In fact, this interaction may actually *strengthen* the behaviour.
- **Reinforce.** Resist the urge to give them what they want (your attention, food, access outside, etc.) to stop their meowing.



## How to prevent excessive vocalization

If your cat is vocalizing excessively because they want something, then you should probably make sure they have it... just not whenever they demand it.

- **Food.** Feed your cat on a regular schedule. If they can reliably predict when food will arrive, they will be less likely to demand it at other times. Providing a larger number of smaller meals throughout the day may also help with this.
- **Human interaction.** Most cats enjoy playing with their humans. Cats that vocalize excessively are often high-energy and require extra playtime to tire them out. In fact, these vocalizations often seem aimed at getting your attention to stave off boredom. Ensure you are providing enough interactive playtime with your cat. Much like mealtime, it is best to schedule playtime predictably so that your cat learns when they can expect it. You should also provide plenty of solo-play toys so that they can play by themselves outside of your scheduled play sessions.
- **Environmental enrichment.** It is also important to make sure your home is equipped with the supplies necessary to keep your cat entertained, including hiding opportunities, perching/climbing structures, scratching posts, food puzzles, and a rotation of solo-play toys (see [Environmental Enrichment](#) for more information).

## Final thoughts

- The most important tool you have in battling this issue, is patience. It may be a slow process, but trust in consistency, and you should start seeing results soon.
- Some breeds of cat are more likely to engage in excessive vocalizations. If you have a Siamese, for example, this problem may be more difficult to control.
- For high-energy cats, teaching tricks can be a great way to help use up that extra energy. Consider adding this to your scheduled play sessions (see [Trick Training Your Cat](#) for more information).
- Consider getting another cat! If your cat is vocalizing because they are bored or lonely, another cat might be just the cure for what ails them.

