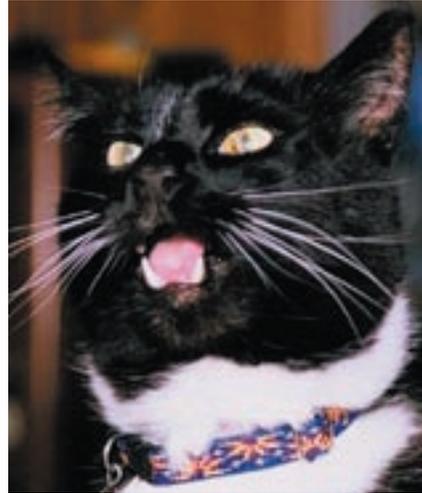


# The Talkative Cat

By Karen Sueda, DVM

Cats communicate through a variety of vocalizations – meowing, purring, and hissing, among others. They display their unique personalities through these vocalizations, a characteristic most people find endearing. When these vocalizations become excessive or occur at inopportune times, however, problems arise.



## What is excessive vocalization?

Excessive vocalization does not have a strict definition. What is considered “excessive” depends on the tolerance level of the individual listener, which may be influenced by many factors, including prior experience with cats, the type of vocalization, the time of day, and the perceived reason for the vocalization. For example, a cat meowing loudly for breakfast may be more tolerable than the same cat repeatedly meowing for no apparent reason in the middle of the night.

## When is excessive vocalization normal?

All vocalization is normal – it’s the way cats communicate with each other and with us. Normal increases in vocalization occur during mating season when female cats are in heat and male cats compete for access to them. (One good reason to spay/neuter your cats is to eliminate this cacophony!) Increases in vocalization are also common when there are changes in the household, such as a move to a new place or a change from being an outdoor to an indoor pet. In these cases, the increases in vocalization may be transient. Certain cat breeds, notably the Siamese, vocalize more than others.

## What causes excessive vocalization?

The most common cause of excessive vocalization is attention-seeking, a learned behavior. Many cats learn to meow to signal their wish to go outside or be fed. This technique is especially effective early in the morning or at night when you are tired. To stop the offending noise, you readily acquiesce to your cat’s demands. Once cats expect your attention, they continue to vocalize even if you attempt to ignore their behavior. As you probably are aware, most cats will outlast you, and you eventually give in.

Excessive vocalization may also indicate the presence of a medical or more serious behavior problem. Cats may meow excessively when they are in pain or possess neurological problems or sensory deficits such as hearing or vision loss. Anxiety disorders, aggression, cognitive dysfunction, or other behavioral problem can also cause cats to vocalize repeatedly. Consult with your veterinarian or a veterinary behaviorist to determine if medical or behavioral problems exist.

## How do you treat excessive vocalization?

Treatment for excessive vocalization depends on the underlying problem. All cats should be taken to a veterinarian or veterinary behaviorist so a primary medical or behavioral diagnosis can be made.

If attention-seeking behavior is diagnosed, you must consistently ignore your cat's vocalization, refusing to respond to any request for attention until the cat is quiet. Typically, cats will initially vocalize more and for longer periods of time before they finally give up. During this time, you must continue to ignore the cat. If you give in, your cat will learn that louder and longer vocalization is the only way to reliably get your attention.

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