

Do You Let Your Pet Enjoy This Nighttime Luxury? Be Careful

As is so often the case, know the pros and cons before proceeding. Some people swear by it, others wouldn't dream of it. Certain people should avoid it completely. And please note — even one night, and you might never hear the end of it.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Surveys suggest that 62% of cats sleep with their adult owners while another 13% sleep with children in the household
- In one survey, 41% of those who share a bed with their cat described them as unobtrusive or beneficial to sleep
- Cats provide a source of companionship that can be soothing in the middle of the night
- Cats are nocturnal, so they may disrupt your sleep if they want to play in the middle of the night and, as with most animals, there's also a low risk of transmission of zoonotic diseases
- Infants, young children and people with compromised immune systems should avoid sleeping with cats, but healthy adults who enjoy it can safely continue

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There are more than 94 million pet cats in the U.S.,¹ and the majority of them get to snuggle up next to their owners in bed come nighttime. Surveys suggest that 62% of cats sleep with their adult owners while another 13% sleep with children in the household.² The immediate benefits of sleep alongside a cat are obvious: they're soft, warm and cozy.

They may purr and their rhythmic breathing can lull you off to sleep. Not to mention that they provide a source of companionship that can be soothing in the middle of the night. Yet, there's no denying the fact that cats are nocturnal, which conflicts with most humans' desire to sleep at night.

Cats may decide that 1 a.m. is the perfect time for a play session with your feet, or they may let you know — loudly and persistently — that they want their breakfast early. The decision of whether or not to share your bed with your cat is highly personal, but if you're on the fence, here are some of the top considerations to think about.

Research Suggests Co-Sleeping with Your Cat May Help You Sleep

Depending on your cat's personality, it's quite possible that he could interrupt your sleep on a fairly regular basis. But this isn't usually the case.

Researchers surveyed 150 patients seen at the Center for Sleep Medicine, Mayo Clinic in Arizona. Fifty-six percent of them said they allowed their pets (mostly dogs or cats) to sleep in the bedroom, and while 20% said their pets were disruptive to their sleep, 41% described them as unobtrusive or beneficial to sleep.³

Writing in the journal *Human Nature*, researchers also state that human-animal co-sleeping isn't well understood, but should be viewed as a "legitimate and socially relevant" form of co-sleeping, similar to co-sleeping with a child.

"[W]e recommend that co-sleeping be approached broadly as a social practice involving relations with humans and other animals," they said, adding that human-animal co-sleeping practices should be integrated into our understanding of human sleep.⁴ In short, there's a good chance that you're not the only one on your block cozying up to your kitty at night — and that's perfectly fine.

Petting animals is known to relieve stress and boost the production of oxytocin, the love hormone. Cat owners even have a lower risk of death due to heart attack and cardiovascular diseases, including stroke,⁵ so it's possible that spending as much time with your feline as possible may only benefit your health.

Risks of Sleeping with Your Kitty

The most likely risk of inviting your kitty into your bed is that he ends up being a disruptive sleeping partner who meows in your ear or paws at your arm or face when you'd rather be drifting off to dreamland. The reality is that once your kitty views your bed as his, it may be difficult to get him out, and you should expect weeks or months of a slow transition out of the bedroom should you have second thoughts.

For people with allergies, cats may also not be the best bed buddies, as cat dander will become infiltrated not only into your bedroom but also into your bedsheets. Very young children, including infants, should also avoid sleeping with any snuggly animal, as they often like to cuddle up close and could inadvertently suffocate a baby. If a cat gets startled, it could also bolt off the bed, leading to scratches on the child.

The other consideration is that most pets (including cats) have the potential to transmit certain diseases to their owners. The overall risk of zoonotic diseases from cats is low, but this risk may be increased via the close contact of bed sharing. For example:⁶

- **Cases of bubonic plague** (spread by fleas) have been reported after cats slept with their owners.
- **Chagas disease**, aka American trypanosomiasis, a deadly infection that can have lifelong effects if not treated, is caused by a protozoan parasite typically found in Mexico, Central and most of South America.

Research has found that dogs and cats infected with Chagas disease increase the risk of transmission to their owners, and infection rates were significantly higher when infected dogs shared sleeping areas with humans (and it's possible this also holds true for cats).

- **Cat scratch disease** — Bartonellosis, also known as cat scratch disease or cat scratch fever, is an emerging global disease most commonly caused in cats by *Bartonella henselae* bacteria. The infectious bacteria are carried in the saliva and feces of infected fleas and certain other external parasites.

The fleas transmit the bacteria to cats in their feces. The flea feces remain on the cat's skin and get ingested when the kitty grooms.

Cats who acquire bartonellosis can become carriers. Since the disease is zoonotic, meaning it can be transmitted from animals to humans and vice versa, cats are able to transmit *Bartonella* bacteria to people through scratches and bites, and also possibly via licking or sleeping next to their owner.

- **Capnocytophaga canimorsus** — Capnocytophaga (pronounced cap-no-sa-TOE-faga) canimorsus is a type of bacteria present in the saliva of dogs and cats. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), up to 74% of dogs and 57% of kitties have capnocytophaga in their mouths.⁷

Capnocytophaga canimorsus has the potential to cause serious infection when it's transmitted to a human. Although such infections are very rare, the CDC reports that capnocytophaga canimorsus infections have been associated with sleeping with a dog or cat.

Other infections that can be transmitted to humans by sharing a bed with a cat include staph infections (including MRSA) and parasitic infections. While the CDC states, "Zoonotic infections acquired by sleeping with a pet are uncommon,"⁸ they also recommend that people most at risk, such as young children and those with compromised immune systems, avoid sharing their bed with their pets.

How to Keep the Peace When Sharing Your Bed with Your Cat

If you're healthy and your cat is free of parasites and transmittable diseases, there's little reason to kick him out of the bedroom if you enjoy his company at night. That being said, you should establish some ground rules right off the bat to keep things amicable. For instance, don't indulge his demands for play or snack time at unreasonable hours.

If you do, you can expect that he'll demand the next night too. Giving your kitty plenty of playtime during the day, and even a raucous session right before bed, may help him stay calm while you're trying to sleep. Breakfast should also be served at the same time each morning, at a time that works for your regular schedule (resist the urge to give in and feed your cat in the middle of the night).

If you've already been sharing your bed with your cat and found that you don't make good sleeping buddies, you'll need to keep your cat out of the bedroom entirely. Unlike dogs, who can be taught to sleep on the floor in your bedroom, cats are unlikely to stay off the bed once they're allowed in your room.

This may not be as simple as closing the door, unfortunately, as your kitty will likely make a scene right outside, crying or scratching at the door and floor until you let him in.

You can try placing objects outside your door that your cat dislikes to keep him away (such as tin foil or blown up balloons), but a better option is to lure him to another area of your home with enticing new toys (such as treat-release options), soft bedding and perhaps a perch where he can get a night-time view into your backyard.

The more enticing you make the alternative option to your bedroom, the more likely your cat will be to eventually abandon his stakeout outside your bedroom door in favor of his new nighttime locale. Consistency is also key — don't allow your cat back into your bed, even for "just one night" — unless you're planning to make him a permanent bedtime resident.

Sources and References

¹ [HumanePro, Pets by the numbers](#)

^{2,6,8} [CDC, Zoonoses in the Bedroom, January 26, 2011 \(PDF\)](#)

³ [Mayo Clin Proc. 2015 Dec;90\(12\):1663-5](#)

⁴ [Hum Nat. 2017 Sep;28\(3\):255-273](#)

⁵ [J Vasc Interv Neurol. 2009 Jan;2\(1\):132-135](#)

⁷ [CDC, May 9, 2024.](#)