

How to Get Your Dog to Sleep All Night

By nature, dogs are most active at dawn and dusk. But when living with humans, most dogs adjust their sleeping patterns to that of their owners. If your pooch is showing restless behavior at night, consider these five factors that may be keeping him awake.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Dogs are crepuscular animals, which means, if left to their own devices as they are in the wild, they're most active at dawn and dusk; when living with humans, most dogs adjust their sleeping patterns to that of their owners
- Consider a vigorous exercise session in the late afternoon or early evening to tire your dog out for bedtime; for restless dogs, an hour of exercise a day, with at least one exhausting sprint, is recommended
- Food sensitivities can contribute to restless behavior at night, so make sure your dog is eating a clean, human-grade, fresh food diet to minimize potential reactions
- Your dog may sleep better if he's in your bedroom, as many dogs enjoy sleeping near (or with) their owners
- If your dog is restless at night, try using a grounding mat, which can help balance his circadian rhythm, particularly if he doesn't spend much time outdoors

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Dogs are crepuscular animals, which means, if left to their own devices as they are in the wild, they're most active at dawn and dusk, during the twilight hours. Feral dogs typically follow this pattern, which explains why dogs may be colorblind and struggle to differentiate between green and red¹ — such color vision is not necessary in the waning light of dusk and dawn.

However, when living amongst humans, dogs are masters at adaptation and often adjust their sleeping schedule to gel with that of their owner. There are exceptions to this rule, with some dogs preferring to sleep all day and play all night.

Other dogs, especially those like the Great Pyrenees or Tibetan mastiff, which are commonly used to guard livestock, will adjust their schedule to be more active at night in order to protect livestock from nocturnal predators. In your home, you'd probably prefer if your pup would nod off for a night's sleep around the same time you do, and sleep through the night soundly, or at least quietly.

If you've got a perpetual waker or an early-morning alarm clock on your hands instead of a sound snuggler, there could be some reasons why he's not sleeping all night — and ways to help him sleep straight through.

Your Dog's Sleep Needs Vary with Age

Dogs typically sleep for about 12 to 14 hours of a 24-hour period, but not in one solid stretch. If you have a puppy, expect that he'll sleep even more — up to 18 to 20 hours a day. The same goes for older dogs, which may spend more of the daytime hours napping.

Puppies may need to empty their bladders during the night and often won't sleep through the night until they're at least 4 months of age. An older dog may also need to be let out to potty with greater urgency. In either case, try taking your dog outside for a late-night potty break right before you head to bed.

If your dog is healthy, older than 4 months and still spends much of the night feeling restless, barking or otherwise unable to sleep, there could be several reasons why.

Reasons Your Dog May Not Be Sleeping at Night — and What to Do About It

- **You're gone for long periods during the day** — If your dog is bored and lacks mental and physical stimulation during the day, he'll probably sleep more during the day, leaving him raring to go come nighttime.

Doggy daycare is a simple solution, which could be a facility where you drop off your dog for a few hours of playtime or a professional dog walker who comes to your home. There are even adventure companies that will take your dog on outdoor hikes and more.

- **Lack of physical and mental exercise** — All dogs need time for vigorous exercise daily. If yours isn't getting it, he may have no outlet for his energy and may feel restless at night. Be sure your dog is getting at least 20 minutes of heart-thumping exercise at least three times a week, although most dogs can benefit from longer sessions every day of the week, particularly if they're not tired enough at night for sleep.

Consider a vigorous exercise session in the late afternoon or early evening to tire your dog out for bedtime. For restless dogs, an hour of exercise a day, with at least one exhausting sprint, is recommended. Mental stimulation, such as taking an obedience class or engaging in **nose work**, will also be helpful.

- **Feeding the wrong food or eating too close to bedtime** — Food sensitivities can contribute to restless behavior at night, so make sure your dog is eating a clean, nutritionally balanced real food diet made with human-grade ingredients. This is the best way to avoid the contaminants, allergens and unnecessary additives that can spark sensitivities over time.

Feeding too close to bedtime can also be problematic, as it may cause your dog to have to go potty in the middle of the night. Aim to finish dinnertime several hours before bed so you have time for one last potty break before bed.

- **He doesn't like his sleeping spot** — Dogs appreciate a soft, warm and cozy place to sleep, just like you do. Your dog's nighttime waking could simply be because his bed or sleeping spot isn't comfortable, so experiment with different types of pet beds and locations. Your dog may sleep better if he's in your bedroom, as many dogs enjoy **sleeping near (or with) their owners**.
- **Grounding and EMFs** — Animals in the wild are naturally grounded to the Earth, which allows for the transfer of electrons from the ground into the body, providing numerous benefits, including better sleep.

If your dog is restless at night, try using a grounding mat, which can help balance his circadian rhythm, particularly if he doesn't spend much time outdoors. You can also unplug wireless routers at night to give him

a break from electromagnetic fields (EMFs). Also provide a very dark room for your dog; sleeping with the lights on can make it difficult for your pooch to remain zenned out for the night.

Be Sure to Rule Out Health Problems

There are also health conditions that can interfere with your dog's sleep. In older dogs, cognitive dysfunction syndrome, which is similar to Alzheimer's in humans, can cause "sundowning," which leads to confusion, pacing and restlessness in the evening.

Brachycephalic airway syndrome, which occurs in flat-faced breeds such as pugs and bulldogs, may also lead to difficulty breathing or sleep apnea at night. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is another factor that can keep your dog up at night, particularly in military and police dogs or rescue dogs who have been through trauma.

If your dog's sleeping habits change significantly, be sure to see your veterinarian to rule out underlying health problems. In most cases, though, interventions to increase activity and mental stimulation during the day should go a long way toward encouraging sleep at night. Do keep in mind that, even then, dogs have a different sleep-wake cycle than humans.

During an eight-hour nighttime period, one study found that dogs averaged 23 sleep-wake episodes, with the average sleep-wake cycle consisting of 16 minutes asleep followed by five minutes awake.² This doesn't necessarily mean that you'll be aware your dog is awake during that time — he'll likely lie quietly.

But it can be reassuring to know that your sleeping buddy may be sleeping with "one eye open," so to speak, providing you with extra protection and companionship at the same time.

Sources and References

¹ [Royal Society Open Science November 1, 2017](#)

² [Applied Animal Behaviour Science Volume 36, Issues 2–3, April 1993, Pages 233-248](#)
