

When Your Cat's Meowing May Be a Red Flag in Disguise

What's normal and what's not when it comes to your kitty's vocalizations? There are definitely vocal sounds that shouldn't be ignored, especially when coupled with these behaviors. Know the 8 most common ways your cat communicates through sound, and when to worry that something may be wrong.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- If your cat is meowing a lot, it may or may not be cause for concern
- Some cats just naturally meow more than others, and in addition, there are things their humans do that actually encourage them to vocalize
- There are several different types of feline vocalizations, and it's important to know what's normal for your cat
- There are a number of feline disorders that can cause an increase (or in some cases, a decrease) in vocalization, so a sudden or dramatic change in the frequency or loudness of your kitty's cries should prompt a visit to your veterinarian
- If kitty is typically fairly quiet but suddenly gets talkative, or cries when she jumps onto or off of high surfaces, or when you're holding or petting her, you should make an appointment with your veterinarian

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A very common question many pet parents have is, "Why does my cat meow constantly? Is he sick, or is he just trying to drive me nuts?" Even if the crying isn't constant, it can be frequent enough to be of concern, and sometimes it's just plain annoying. Just as some dogs bark more than others, some kitties tend to meow a lot (just ask anyone with a Siamese at home). If Mr. Whiskers is otherwise healthy and is meowing right at you, he probably wants something. And that something is usually food or attention.

Cats whose owners answer their meows tend to grow more meow-y over time, until the cat and his human are actually having lengthy conversations. And kitties who learn they get food if they meow will ramp up the behavior — especially around mealtime. Senior and geriatric cats also tend to vocalize more, especially at night.

8 Types of Cat Vocalizations

Cats meow to communicate with other cats as well as with humans, and they actually have a rather extensive range of vocalizations. You may know the difference between your cat's dinnertime meow, for example, and the way she sounds if she's frightened or annoyed. But many kitty sounds and intonations are more subtle and don't fit a particular pattern, which can make them harder to interpret. Here's a cheat sheet for decoding some common kitty chatter:¹

Vocalization	How It Sounds	What It Means	Translation
Meow	The classic mee-yoww	Usually just a shout-out to whoever is around	"Hey there!"
Purr	Similar to a low idling motor; made by contracting the muscles of the larynx	A sign of contentment in most cats; rarely, a sign of anxiety or illness	"Backrub feels great ... don't stop!"
Murmur, trill	Soft rhythmic "thump" made on exhalation	A request or greeting	"Pet me?"
Growl, hiss, spit	Low-pitched, severe, "I mean business" sound	Kitty is feeling fearful, stressed, defensive or aggressive	"Back off!"
Shriek or screech	High-pitched, loud, harsh scream	Kitty is either in pain or about to cause some	"Ouch!" "Don't touch me!" "Get away from me!"
Chatter	Teeth chattering; jaw vibrating	Feline hunting sound; frustration from being unable to hunt visible prey	"Let me at it ... let me at it ... let me at it!"
Howl or yowl	Loud, drawn out calls	Cognitive dysfunction in older cats; aggression; distress	"Where are you?" "Where am I?" "Why am I yelling?"
Moan	Long, low, throaty cry	Prelude to vomiting, bringing up a hairball	"Get here quick I'm about to make a mess!"

When to Worry About Your Cat's Meowing

Since you know your pet better than anyone else, it's up to you to learn his "normal" when it comes to vocalizations so you can immediately pick up on any change in the way he communicates.

Changes in your cat's meow can signal an underlying medical condition, such as laryngeal disease, high blood pressure or **hyperthyroidism**. It can also mean he's dealing with a painful and life-threatening problem such as a urinary tract blockage, especially if he cries out while in his litterbox.

In older cats, increased meowing can be the result of cognitive dysfunction, which is essentially a form of **dementia**. If your senior or geriatric kitty also seems disoriented, he could be vocalizing due to stress or confusion.

When to Call the Vet

Generally speaking, almost any feline medical condition that results in physical or mental discomfort can cause your cat to vocalize more often or abnormally. If kitty is typically fairly quiet but suddenly gets talkative, or cries when she jumps onto or off of high surfaces, or when you're holding or petting her, you should make an appointment with your veterinarian.

This is especially true if you've noticed other changes, such as a decrease or increase in appetite or sleep patterns, **eliminating outside the litterbox**, a change in the way she walks or sits or rests, a lack of interest in grooming or a desire to hide away from the rest of the family. Also keep in mind that a normally talkative cat who suddenly grows quiet can also be cause for concern.

Sources and References

[PetMD](#)

¹ [dvm360, April 15, 2015 \(Archived\)](#).
