

Pets in the Bedroom: Helpful or Harmful for Sleep?

A surprising number of pet owners sleep with their pets, but the experience differs widely depending on whom you ask. While some revel in the cozy companionship of their dog or cat sharing their bed, others find it interferes with getting a quality night's sleep.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- 41% of pet owners perceived their pets as unobtrusive or even beneficial to sleep
- In other research, 53% of pet owners said their pets disrupted their sleep at night
- If you enjoy it and sleep well, there's no reason to stop sharing your bed with your pets; a dog or cat in your bed can provide companionship, warmth and a sense of security

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Americans, in general, love to cuddle up in bed with their pets. One Vetstreet poll found that 83% of readers and 75% of veterinary professionals surveyed said they share their bed with their pet.¹

But despite its commonality, sleeping with pets is often regarded as a major disruption to sleep. If you value your shut eye, and want to actually get some quality rest at night, it's best to banish your pets from the bedroom — or so the prevailing dogma goes.

But do pets sharing the bed really disrupt their owner's sleep? You certainly have your own opinion on this, but let's see what the science says.

Many Pet Owners Say They Sleep Better With Their Pets

Far from being a disturbance, a recent study published in Mayo Clinic Proceedings revealed that 41% of pet owners perceived their pets as unobtrusive or even beneficial to sleep.²

Many of those surveyed said they felt secure, content and relaxed when their pet slept nearby. According to Health Day News:³

"A single 64-year-old woman commented that she felt more content when her small dog slept under the covers near her feet," ... [researchers] wrote.

In addition, they reported that a 50-year-old woman said she did "'not mind when my lovely cat' slept on her chest and another described her cat as 'soothing.'"

Some people even said that part of the reason they acquired a dog or cat in the first place was to help them relax at night, and this was especially true for single people or people whose partners often traveled or worked at night."

A dog or cat in your bed can provide companionship and a sense of security, the latter of which may help soothe a child who's afraid of the dark. In the winter, you and your pet can keep each other warm, and a dog in your bed can act as an alarm against potential intruders.

Not to mention, the bond that sharing your sleeping space with your pet creates is hard to beat. If you're one of those people who can't sleep until your pet is curled up next to you in bed, this research will come as no surprise. But it isn't this way for everyone.

Majority of Pet Owners Say Their Pets Disrupt Their Sleep

Not everyone has a blissful night's sleep next to his or her pets. In one study, more than half (53%) of pet owners said their pets disrupted their sleep at night.⁴ The Mayo Clinic Proceedings study also found that 20% of pet owners found their pets to be disruptive to their sleep.

The problem of sleeping with a pet may be especially amplified with cats, according to Russell Rosenberg, Ph. D, board-certified sleep specialist and chairman of the board of the National Sleep Foundation. He wrote in the Huffington Post:⁵

"Cats will do almost anything to get your attention when they are hungry or bored. Most cat owners have experienced the wonderful wake-up call of a cat sitting on their face or pawing at their cheeks to let them know it is time to get moving! ...

While the aforementioned cat wake-up call might work out if cats and humans had the same sleep patterns, we do not. Cats [are nocturnal and] spend the majority of the daytime sleeping."

Dogs Wake Frequently During the Night

Dogs can be problematic too, even though they're not nocturnal like cats. Not only do they dream like you do, including potentially "running" or barking in their sleep, but dogs also tend to wake up often during the night and nest. Rosenberg continued:⁶

"Many dogs dig or scratch at their bedding to create a comfortable sleeping area and mark their territory. This instinctual urge is leftover from your dog's wild relatives like foxes and wolves, who dig dens to defend themselves against extreme temperatures and predators.

Since dogs tend to wake up many times throughout the night, your sleep might be disturbed when your dog decides to dig through the sheets."

Aside from waking you up, experts will tell you there's a small risk that your pet could transmit a disease to you while you're sleeping. Intestinal parasites, ringworm, meningitis and even antibiotic-resistant infections can potentially be passed from pets to people, which might be worth considering before bringing your pet in your bed, particularly for

young children, the elderly and people with compromised immune systems.

But if you have a well fed, vibrantly healthy pet that's been examined by a vet and has lived with you for many months or years, you don't need to panic about zoonotic conditions in most circumstances.

Tips for a More Restful Night's Sleep With Your Pet

If you allow your pet to share your bed (or even your bedroom), you should set up some 'ground rules.' If your cat wants to have a play session at 3 a.m. and you indulge her, you can expect her to wake you up again the next night — and likewise if your dog begs for food at midnight.

There are some proactive solutions you can take to avoid situations such as these, including making sure your cat gets ample playtime during the day, and moving your dog's dinnertime (and last potty trip) a bit later to sustain him overnight.

Ultimately, however, if you expect to sleep through the night, it's important that you set a schedule for your pet that includes playtime, exercise and feeding during daylight hours only — and stick to it. (If you have a puppy or kitten, this doesn't apply, as you can expect them to need attention during the night.)

Do You Want Your Bedroom Back?

If you enjoy sharing your bed or bedroom with your pets, then go right on enjoying. If, however, you're having trouble sleeping because of your furry bedmates, it may be time for a change in sleeping arrangements.

This can be done, although it will take some persistence, especially if you've been sharing your bed with a cat. Here's how:

If your pet is a dog:

- Invest in a good-quality, nontoxic (organic) dog bed and place it at the side or foot of your bed. Add pillows, blankets and special nighttime toys as you see fit.
- Teach your dog to get off your bed and onto his bed on command, using praise, treats and affection each time he executes the desired behavior.
- Remember: reinforcing good behavior is how dogs learn. Give your pup no attention while he's on your bed; lavish attention on him when he is on his own bed on the floor.
- Consider placing pillows where he would normally position himself, making it less convenient to find a comfy spot if he jumps up to try and settle in.
- Understand your dog will continue to jump up on your bed at night for a while. You are his pack leader and nature is telling him to sleep as close as possible to his pack. Each time he jumps up on your bed give the command to get down.
- After several nights or even a week or two of being commanded (repeatedly) off the bed, your dog may learn to wait until you're asleep to join you.

He's not being sneaky or disobedient — he's following his instincts as a pack animal whose pack leader has always been right next to him in bed. With patience, persistence and consistency, your pup will eventually figure out his new sleeping spot is on the floor.

If your pet is a cat:

- You won't be able to keep your cat off your bed if she's in your bedroom, so I recommend you not even try. You can shoo her away before you drift off, but your stealthy little feline will be right back on 'her' bed long before you fall fully asleep.
- Shutting kitty out of the bedroom is not apt to be as simple as it sounds, either. Cats don't take kindly to forfeiting territory.

She'll likely cause a ruckus right outside the door — crying, yowling, thumping, smacking at the door handle, scratching at the floor. Or she might become destructive from frustration. Placing an automatic laser pointer outside your bedroom door can help dissuade her from being obnoxious early on.

- You'll need to try to entice your cat to other places in your house at night with things like treat-release foraging toys, other favorite toys, or maybe a kitty condo or perch near an outside light so she can look through the window for nocturnal prey.

Also provide her with soft, warm, organic bedding if she doesn't already have a favorite napping spot elsewhere in the house.

Creativity is the key to success here — you have to give your cat something to do besides obsess over no longer being allowed in the bed she so generously shared with you.

Sources and References

[Mayo Clinic Proceedings December 2015](#)

[Philly.com December 15, 2015](#)

¹ [Vetstreet April 23, 2014](#)

² [Mayo Clinic Proceedings December 2015](#)

³ [Philly.com December 15, 2015](#)

⁴ [Science Daily February 15, 2002](#)

^{5, 6} [Huffington Post January 7, 2013](#)
