

Six Dog Sleeping Positions and What Each Says About Your Dog's Mood

How your dog sleeps reveals much about him and his mood. Can you read his body language while he sleeps? Certain positions show that he's fully relaxed, confident and content. What's your dog telling you today?

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- The way your dog sleeps — curled up in a ball, spread out over the entire bed or on his back, for instance — can give you insights into your dog's mood
- Sleeping on his side with his legs outstretched is a sign of a fully relaxed, confident and content dog
- Dogs often sleep curled up in a donut shape, with their nose nearly touching their tail; this conserves body heat while also protecting his organs from predators
- A dog sleeping on his back, perhaps with his legs up in the air, is confident in his surroundings
- If your dog prefers to sleep pressed up against you or perhaps another dog in your family, this likely goes back to his days of being a puppy, when he and his littermates piled together for security and warmth

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Dogs typically sleep for about 12 to 14 hours in a 24-hour period, taking on any number of sleeping positions during that time. You've probably seen your share of interesting poses, especially if your pet often snoozes by your side.

Aside from the fact that dogs, like people, may choose a position based solely on comfort, the way your dog sleeps — curled up in a ball, spread out over the entire bed or on his back, for instance — can give you insights into your dog's mood. You may even be able to read some of his body language while he sleeps.

Doggy Sleeping Positions, Revealed

- **The lion pose** — Stanley Coren, Ph.D., professor emeritus at the University of British Columbia and author of "Do Dogs Dream," describes the lion pose as your dog sleeping with paws stretched forward and his head resting on top, sort of like a lion statue that might sit in front of a museum. "If you see a dog in a lion pose ... the dog is apt to be simply dozing and not in a deep sleep state," he told PetMD.¹
- **Side sleeper** — Sleeping on his side with his legs outstretched is a sign of a fully relaxed, confident and content dog. Dogs sleeping on their side typically have a strong bond with their family and pack² and trusts that he's safe while sleeping in this otherwise vulnerable position. A dog stretched out on his side on a cool surface may also be doing so because he's hot.

- **Curled up in a ball** — Dogs often sleep curled up in a donut shape, with their nose nearly touching their tail. This conserves body heat, helping your dog stay warm, while also protecting his organs from predators. In the wild, dogs would dig a nest and curl up in a ball for both warmth and protection, and many pet dogs continue this in their homes.

Your dog may also "dig" a nest for himself in a pile of blankets prior to taking on this sleeping position. You might even compare it to the cozy "fetal position" humans may use during sleep.

- **The flying superdog** — Does your dog stretch out on his stomach, with his front and back paws extended? This superdog pose is most common among puppies and small dogs, perhaps because it's not as comfortable for larger dogs to rest in this position. Your dog may also try to lay his belly on the floor to cool off. Coren told PetMD:³

"What you call the 'Superman position' — with limbs outstretched and belly against the floor — is also a response to a warm environment, but usually occurs in situations where the surface that the dog is lying on is relatively cooler than the air around him."

- **On his back** — A dog sleeping on his back, perhaps with his legs up in the air, is confident in his surroundings. This position is typically not done in the wild, as it leaves the animal vulnerable to predators, but pet dogs may find this sleeping position comfortable, especially if they feel very safe and relaxed.
- **Up against you** — If your dog prefers to sleep pressed up against you or perhaps another dog in your family, this likely goes back to his days of being a puppy, when he and his littermates piled together for security and warmth. Dogs are pack animals, and you're part of his pack. It's natural for him to want to sleep close by, and many dog owners enjoy it as well. Surveys suggest that 56% of **dog owners sleep next to their dogs**, with about half sharing the bed.⁴

Is Your Dog Getting a Good Night's Rest?

While dogs' sleeping patterns are much like humans', dogs don't sleep straight through the night the way we do. 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.⁵

This doesn't necessarily mean that you'll be aware your dog is awake during that time — he'll likely lie quietly. It also doesn't mean that he's not getting quality rest, but if your dog seems especially restless or is unable to find a comfortable position to sleep in, you should have him checked out by your veterinarian to rule out pain or other symptoms and health conditions that could be keeping him awake.

You can also use a grounding mat, which can help balance his circadian rhythm, particularly if your dog doesn't spend much time outdoors. Wild animals are naturally grounded to the Earth, which provides numerous benefits due to the transfer of electrons from the ground to their body.

You can also unplug wireless routers at night to give him a break from electromagnetic fields (EMFs). For dogs who seem unable to settle down, a grounding mat can make all the difference. You may even find that your dog starts sleeping in entirely new positions once he has access.

Choose a Dog Bed with Your Dog's Favorite Sleeping Positions in Mind

In addition, be sure to provide a comfortable, adequately sized bed, made from natural materials, in a quiet, cozy spot. Depending on your dog's favorite sleeping position, you can choose a dog bed to match.

For instance, dogs who sleep curled up may like a round bed with deep sides, whereas side sleepers may prefer a cushioned, flatter surface to spread out on. For belly or back sleepers, an elevated bed may help keep your dog cool and supported. If your dog uses many different sleep positions depending on his mood, that's fine too. Provide a variety of sleep surfaces and let him choose the type he likes best.

Sources and References

^{1, 3} [PetMD, 5 Dog Sleeping Positions and What They Mean](#)

² [Animal Channel June 14, 2018](#)

⁴ [CDC, Zoonoses in the Bedroom January 26, 2011](#)

⁵ [Applied Animal Behaviour Science Volume 36, Issues 2-3, April 1993, Pages 233-248](#)
