

**Sleep and Dreams in Dogs and Cats**  
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Recently we talked with an owner whose dog would bite if awakened from its sleep. A friend told the owner that the dog was biting because he was being awakened from a bad dream. We have no way to know if this explanation is correct but it does bring up some interesting questions about our pets' sleep habits.

First, do dogs and cats dream? Dreams are subjective experiences and no one has found a reliable way to get our pets to tell us about them! In people, dreams seem to occur in a phase of sleep called active or REM sleep, where the brain is highly active but the person is unresponsive to the environment.

Active sleep alternates during the night with quiet sleep where brain activity is slower and more uniform but people are still unresponsive. Almost all birds and mammals that have been studied also show both active and quiet sleep based on recordings of their brain waves.

Dogs and cats spend about 24% of their sleep time in active sleep. Sometimes the animal will twitch and vocalize while in active sleep. Although we can't know whether these behaviors are correlated with dreams, many people seem to enjoy speculating about what their pets might be dreaming about.

How much do dogs and cats sleep? Under controlled laboratory conditions both cats and dogs sleep about 13 hours per day but they wake up more frequently than people do. How much and when pets sleep varies enormously depending on the social and physical environment.

A dog living as an only pet in an apartment may sleep much more than one working as a herding dog on a farm. Pets will often adjust their activity and sleep cycles so that they can be active when people and other animals are active. Many "nocturnal" cats will be inactive at night when the household is asleep and active when the household is awake.

Of course there are some pets - probably cats more than dogs, who find it great fun to wake you up by prancing across your face at 2am. This behavior becomes a habit when it works for the cat - when it triggers some sort of reaction from you.

Yawning and sleep are also conflict behaviors that can occur in stressful situations. Animals yawn when they are nervous or prevented from doing something they want to do. By falling asleep, animals can cope with stress by avoiding it.