

## FAQs About Deaf Cats

Most cats are resilient and adapt to deafness. Your gentle care and loving attention will go a long way in helping your deaf cat adjust to life without sound.

### What causes deafness in cats?

Some cats are born deaf or are genetically predisposed to deafness. Chronic ear infections can cause deafness, and some drugs are toxic to the nerves associated with hearing. Age-related deafness is the most common cause. It can develop rapidly or gradually when the tiny bones of the middle ear lose their flexibility to vibrate and transmit sound. Hearing loss can be accelerated by damage from loud noises. Chronic ear infections and ear mites may also result in hearing loss.

### In what ways are deaf cats different from hearing cats?

Deaf cats compensate for their hearing loss by relying more on their other senses. They tend to watch people and other pets more closely, and take cues from their people's behavior. Deaf pets also pay closer attention to vibrations and air currents. For example, the breeze made by a door opening may cue a deaf pet that someone has arrived. Some deaf cats meow more often and more loudly, because they cannot regulate their "volume," while others become mute.

### How do I communicate with my deaf cat?

There are many different ways to communicate without sound. You can simply wave at your cat to get his or her attention, or flip a light on and off. At close range, sharp hand claps might provide enough vibration in the air to get your cat's attention. Pointing a flashlight or pen light in the direction of the cat and turning it on and off can do the trick, too, especially if the flashing light is followed by a tasty incentive. You can also use a laser light, but be careful not to shine it in the cat's eyes. Another method: Throw a small ball or soft toy into your cat's line of sight. Before you do something to get your deaf cat's attention, consider whether the action will frighten your pet.

At feeding time, flick an overhead light on and off two or three times and/or tap your toes on the floor to call the cat. Your cat can feel the vibrations if he is relatively close. It may not be necessary to alert your cat that it's mealtime, however, because many cats have an "internal clock" that tells them it's time to eat.

To awaken your cat, walk over to him and lightly tap the ground. The cat will feel the vibrations and wake up in a calm way. You can also gently pat the surface where your cat is sleeping or flick the lights. It's best not to touch the cat to get him to wake up because it could startle him and result in biting or scratching.

Try to develop a consistent communication method, so your cat knows what to expect. To show your affection, use loving touch or the "I love you" slow blink, and your cat will get the message.

### Can I train my deaf cat?

Deaf cats can be trained using the basic premise of clicker training, but instead of a clicker sound, you can use a flashlight or a flash from a camera to mark the desired response. Some deaf cats learn to respond to hand signals similar to those used in distance control of dogs.

## TIPS FOR ADOPTERS OF DEAF CATS

### To keep your deaf cat happy and safe:

- Use identification: Microchip your cat and have her wear an ID tag with "deaf cat" noted on it.
- Attach a Cat Locator pendant to the cat's collar. The pendant emits a tone when the handheld applicator is activated, to help you find your deaf cat. Also, the vibration from the tone can be used as a training signal to curb undesirable behaviors.
- Never let a deaf cat outside unsupervised. The cat will not be able to hear traffic or other perils, and won't have the necessary reaction time to avoid dangerous situations.
- If you want your cat to spend time outdoors, teach him to walk with a harness and leash, or construct a cattery to enable your cat to enjoy the outdoors safely.
- If you take your cat on walks outdoors, it's a good idea to write "I am deaf" on the cat's collar, harness or bandana to alert people when they are approaching him.
- If you feel that your cat is lonely, consider adopting another pet. You'll want to carefully screen any new pet, of course, to make sure this new friend is gentle and will be a good companion for your deaf cat.
- Alert your cat to your comings and goings by touching him gently (if he's not sleeping, that is) when you enter or leave a room.
- Touch or pet your cat when you are talking, so that your cat will feel the vibration of your hand as you speak.
- Make time every day to pet, cuddle and play with your cat. Hearing-impaired cats need company. The warmth of your hands is soothing to them in a silent world.
- Offer your cat a variety of toys. Deaf cats have other senses — touch, smell, taste and vision — that can be engaged. Be creative.
- To curb excessive meowing, try placing a small, gently vibrating dog collar under the cat's bed pillow (not around the cat's neck). The vibrations of the collar can have a calming effect.