



Feline Forum

Courtesy of:

The Cat's Meow: A Lesson in Feline Language

For centuries man has pondered the ability of cats to communicate with people and the ability of people to understand the nuances of cat language. Extensive studies of feline vocalization patterns were made by Moelk in the 1940s. Moelk described three different vocal patterns based on how the sound was produced—murmur patterns, vowel patterns, and strained intensity patterns. Within each category, various distinctive sounds can occur. Typically the vowels used are *a*, *e*, *o* and *u* and the consonants are *g*, *h*, *m*, *n*, *r*, *t* and *s*.

Murmurs are produced when the mouth is in the closed position. The best example of a murmur, and the most endearing of all the cat sounds, is the purr. However, there are other variations, including the grunt used primarily by kittens; the call, which is a low throaty sound used to coax another cat to come closer; and the acknowledgment, a short murmur with a rapidly falling intonation.

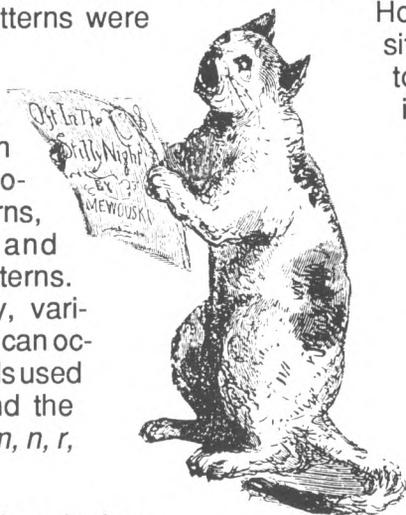
Vowel patterns are created when the mouth is first opened and then gradually closed. Owners are probably most familiar with the demand, which is a loud vocal sound.

However, the intensity can be reduced to a silent meow, in which there is little sound accompanying mouth movement.

Strained intensity patterns indicate extreme emotional states, such as fighting or mating. Most of these begin

with consonants, and include the hiss, growl, snarl. The sounds are produced with the mouth open.

If you have owned cats for several years you are probably familiar with each of the above patterns. Certainly, some cats are known to be much more vocal, such as the Siamese breed, and others are less vocal. If your cat suddenly becomes vocal and it is not associated with mating, fighting or requesting, it could be a signal to a health problem. The best advice is to schedule a your cat for a health exam with a veterinarian to rule out any insidious diseases or disorders.



Epilepsy in Cats

Epilepsy is defined as recurring seizures of any cause. The cause of the seizure may originate in the brain (e.g., brain tumor, head trauma), secondary to other diseases (e.g., rabies, kidney failure, liver disease, low blood sugar), or from ingesting toxic substances (e.g., lead, antifreeze, rat poison). If the diagnostic test results are within normal range, then a diagnosis of idiopathic epilepsy is made. Usually, idiopathic epilepsy is more common in younger cats (less than 7 years old). Fortunately, epilepsy in cats is relatively rare, with only 5 out of every 1,000 cats afflicted.

If a cause can be identified, then your veterinarian will treat the underlying problem to resolve the seizures. However, if the diagnosis is idiopathic epilepsy and the seizures are relatively infrequent (one seizure every four to six weeks), drug therapy may not be administered. Because oral anticonvulsant medications can have adverse side effects, veterinarians use discretion in prescribing medications for idiopathic epileptic cats.

The information for *Feline Forum* has been prepared by the Cornell Feline Health Center, Cornell College of Veterinary Medicine, Ithaca, NY. Copyright 1996.



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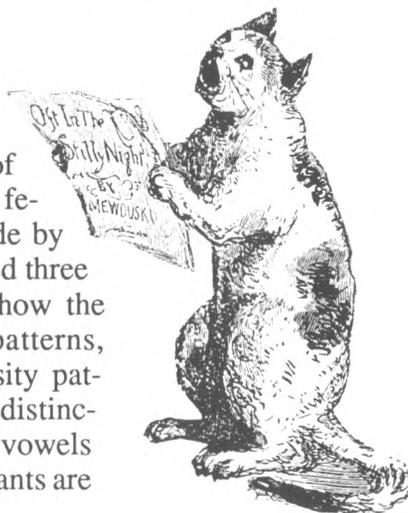
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