



Tips For Feline Fun

There are some great advantages to be gained by keeping your cat confined indoors. These include decreased risk of injury and disease as a result of a significantly longer life expectancy. Not to mention the benefit for wildlife and the appreciation of the non-cat lovers in the community. With the bit of extra effort, these cats can still have a lifestyle that meets their needs.

Even cats that spend some time outdoors can benefit from additional opportunities for mental and physical activity in their home environment. This is particularly true for individuals prone to anxiety disorders. The following suggestions allow cats to focus their energies in a healthy, positive way that helps to relieve stress. Cats are individuals so it is important to trial as many of the following as possible so that you can identify the elements that your cat appreciates the most.

Toys

Cats are very sight sensitive to moving objects, so providing toys with an element of motion will help to attract your cat's interest and enthusiasm for play. These can vary from simple home-made items such as scrunched up pieces of newspaper on the end of a piece of elastic, attached to a stationary object or tied to your belt so they bobble around on the floor behind you as you walk. Various types of toys are also available commercially and these include such things as balls containing bells, cat dancers and various furry items such as mice. Some cats have a predisposition to respond to the pleasurable to catnip. Toys are available that contain this substance or you might like to grow your own indoor garden and include catnip, catmint or catgrass. Simple items such as table tennis balls or non-toxic soap bubbles can provide avenues for fun interaction.

Interacting with the outside world

Cats will often be content with a view of the outside world, even if they cannot venture into it. Some are quite happy with access to a window ledge while others may be more satisfied with an enclosed outdoor run that extends out into the garden area. There are companies that specialise in erecting and designing these structures with your cat's particular needs in mind. Supervised access to the outdoors on a harness is another alternative.

If you have more than one pet and consider there is more tension between different members of the household, you could consider allowing your cat exclusive access to one viewing area that is particularly favoured. It can then become an area of relaxation for this cat that will be identified as a haven from potential threat. Providing a cubby, such as a cardboard box containing an unwashed sweater, in this or other areas of the house will also help your cat feel secure. Make an entry and exit hole and placing it up high also adds to the feeling of security.

Games

Cats often enjoy chasing concentrated dots of light from a penlight or similar source. They like to explore items such as paper bags and boxes, which you can encourage by popping the odd surprise inside. A commercially available "Busy Kitty" takes advantage of this natural curiosity. Cats can be trained to search the house for small piles of food, rather than providing them in one spot. Gradually sprinkle the food away from the bowl until your cat catches onto the idea that it is worth looking in hidden spots for its rations. A Kitty Kong can also have food items placed inside it to extend the pleasure of the meal time. Raw chicken wings can help to keep teeth and gums healthy and provide a suitable chew item.

Scratching posts can prevent damage to furniture items while allowing the cat to enjoy scratching indoors. A climbing post can provide access to areas such as exposed beams and double as a scratching post if covered in a suitable material such as cut pile carpet. Some young, exuberant cats will appreciate the company of a slightly older, energetic cat who they can play with; however, some individuals prefer solitude.

Quality time

There is quite a marked variation in the amount of time different cats like to spend being cuddled. Many will appreciate extended periods of sitting on your lap, being patted or groomed while others dislike too much physical contact at one time. Some owners like doing some obedience work with their cats which include teaching tricks or games such as retrieve or hide and seek. With patience they can respond very well to this type of attention.

Taking time to make life more interesting for your cat can really increase the quality of life that it enjoys and is an opportunity to give back some of the pleasure that their company gives to us

For those cats with specific problems

URINE SPRAYING

Some cats may urine because they are feeling anxious. In these cases you will need to do some extra things to make areas the cat wants to use less attractive or unsuitable, while making the litter tray as attractive and as suitable as possible.

- Clean the soiled area to eliminate smells of the previous urination with cleaners such as the laundry powder, Bio Zet (Kao Australia Marketing) and neutralise, rather than mask, the smell with a product such as Bac to Nature (Nutripet). When possible, clean with 90% alcohol prior to Bac to Nature to further reduce odour. Avoid bleach and ammonia.
 - Confine the cat to a small area that has previously not been sprayed in. Gradually allow access to more of the house once spraying diminishes.
 - Change the significance of the soiled areas by placing there such items as food (superglueing some dry cat food to paper plate placed on that spot), toys, double-sided sticky tape, lemon-scented soap, citrus peels, mothballs, or Snappy Trainers (Innovative Pet Products). Cover the area with thick plastic or plastic hall runners or place the cat's bedding in that area or simply denying access to certain areas until the cat is reliably urinating appropriately. Another alternative is to place a tray in the area the cat prefers and then gradually move it to the area that you consider acceptable. Spraying a pheromone spray on all soiled areas daily for 30 days may help.
 - Spray the cat with a water pistol if it is caught in the act of urine spraying.
 - Provide one litter tray per cat and an extra one in another area, to allow easy access.
 - Clean the tray at least once daily with warm soapy water and preferably every time it was used.
 - Vary the type of litter or add an empty litter tray, as cats have different substrate and / or privacy preferences. Modifications to the tray itself can also be useful, for example, providing a covered tray for more privacy or a tray with a cut down the side for an arthritic cat for easier access.
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- Spend 10 to 15 minutes per day at a set time, playing, grooming and otherwise interacting with the cat on its own.
 - Grow an indoor garden of safe plants such as catnip or catmint for the cat to use.

Some cats may constantly meow or groom themselves to the extent that they have large bald patches. These cats may be feeling anxious or these may be stereotypic behaviours. When these conditions are diagnosed it is advisable to

- Attempt to limit exposure to situations that may lead to anxiety.
- Not to pat or talk softly to the cat when it exhibits the behaviour because this reinforces the fearful response rather than reassures the cat.
- Spend 10 to 15 minutes per day at a set time playing, grooming, and otherwise interacting with the cat on its own.
- Grow an indoor garden of safe plants such as catnip or catmint for the cat to use.
- Provide a variety of toys and alternate or change them weekly.

These exercises require time and patience but have been shown to be effective in most cases of anxiety-related and obsessive-compulsive disorders. Many cats displaying these signs will benefit from the use of anxiety-reducing medications such as CLOMICALM.

Behaviour modification takes time and effort and can be a slow process. Dedicate at least a four week period to start and then assess the situation. If you are having any difficulty please don't hesitate to contact your veterinary clinic.