



The Importance of Cat Play

While pet guardians would never consider withholding food or water from their cats, many may forget to provide adequate exercise and stimulation to their new cat. Even though cats sleep a lot, play is an important component of any pet's health and well-being. The release of energy triggered by regular daily interactive play sessions can help alleviate a cat's stress and prevent any behavior problems.



Stress Reduction

Cats are subject to a variety of stressors, usually the result of perceived or real invasions of their territory. Seeing a roaming cat out the window that they can't chase away, having houseguests, adding a new resident (human or animal), or a trip to the veterinarian can cause anxiety.

One response to stress for cats is eliminating outside the litter box. Another response may be redirected aggression – where the stressed cat takes out her frustration on another cat, the family dog, or even guardians. Over time, stress can cause chronic medical problems. Engaging your cat in regular play sessions can help alleviate her stress and help keep her mentally and physically healthy.

Preventing Behavior Problems

Without appropriate outlets for your cat's energy, she may attack ankles, play too roughly or interrupt her guardian's sleep with nocturnal adventures. Several interactive play sessions per day, especially one timed shortly before bedtime, can help reduce or eliminate these behaviors.

Structured Play Sessions

Simulating the Play Hunt: Create play sessions to mimic your cat's natural hunting behavior. Remember, cats are natural born hunters. Choose a fishing pole toy or one that imitates the noise of flapping bird wings, which is irresistible to most cats. Make the toy soar around the room, engaging your cat's attention. Or simulate mouse activity by sliding the end of the toy around on the floor in quick, jerky movements. Allow your cat to pounce and catch the toy, and bat it around, then jerk the

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toy away for her to chase some more. End the play session by allowing your cat to capture the toy. *Note:* Avoid laser lights for this type of play session as it is important for cats to enjoy the satisfaction of catching a toy as they would catch live prey.

After the Play Session: Sessions should be long enough for your cat to get tired – probably 15-20 minutes, depending on her age and activity level. About five minutes after the end of the session, feed her canned cat food. This mimics what would happen at the end of a real hunt – she would eat her catch. Don't be surprised if your cat takes a long nap after a play session.

Routine: Schedule several play sessions a day, preferably at times when your cat is normally active. Try to make these play sessions about the same time every day. This allows your cat control over her environment, as she can predict and anticipate her interactive play time. A session shortly before bedtime may help prevent a bout of the nighttime crazies.

Other Toys and Activities

- Provide plenty of safe toys for your cat and rotate them to make them more interesting.
- To allow your cat to enjoy the outdoors safely, cat fencing can be added to an outdoor existing fence. It will keep your cat enclosed and other small animals out, or build or buy a small outdoor enclosure.
Note: Cats should never be left unattended outdoors, even in a secure enclosure.
- Some cats even learn to go outdoors on a harness and leash.
- Provide perches with a view. A window with a view of bird activity or squirrels can provide hours of entertainment to your cat. Some cats enjoy watching videos made especially for cats. An aquarium also makes for interesting cat television.
- Hide your cat's food so she has to hunt for it, instead of putting it in a bowl. Also, toys that may be stuffed with food are available at most pet stores.

A Note About Water

Cats that drink more water are less likely to get urinary tract infections. Urinary tract infections are a leading cause of house soiling in cats. Provide your cat with several bowls of water, and make sure the water is always fresh. Since cats usually like to drink running water, consider a cat water foundation, available in most pet stores. Mounting a few rabbit or rodent water bottles in several locations offers another novel drinking opportunity to encourage your cat to drink water.