



FACTSHEET

Happy, healthy indoor cats

Cats can live very happy lives indoors. The health and safety benefits for your cat are huge. There is no risk of being hit by a car, fighting with other cats that may transmit disease, being poisoned or getting lost. The average lifespan of an outdoor cat is estimated to be some 10 years shorter than that of an indoor-only cat.

By keeping your cat indoors, you are not only benefiting your cat, but also yourself. Studies throughout the world have shown that spending time with your cat has a relaxing effect and reduces blood pressure.

The natural environment also benefits when cats are kept indoors, as nocturnal feline hunting can threaten Australian native animals.

At Cat Protection, we encourage all cat owners to keep their cats indoors, or if outdoors, then in a securely fenced area and always inside from dusk to dawn.

The key to happy indoor cats is to provide them with enough stimulation so they don't get bored. Indoor environmental enrichment will allow your cat opportunities to express normal behaviours such as scratching, playing and hiding. All of these are essential for your cat's psychological health. Although cats sleep a lot, you will need to provide at least 30 minutes a day of play time for your cat. This applies to cats of all ages.

The following suggestions will ensure your cat has stimulation throughout the day.

Indoor environmental enrichment

Toys

There is a wide variety of cat toys on the market that will keep your cat happy for hours. Check out jingle balls, catnip stuffed toys and play centres. Some toys allow you to play together, such as teasers and pull-along toys. Play tunnels are a feline favourite, particularly with kittens. Interactive toys are great if you are out at work, as they will engage with your cat when you are away. You can make your own toys from toilet rolls or felt, or simply scrunched up paper. Ping pong balls are inexpensive and popular.

Food puzzles

Try a treat ball; your cat will spend time working out how to get the treats. You can avoid overfeeding by putting some of your cat's regular biscuit allowance in the treat ball. You can make your own food puzzles. Start with simple puzzles so you do not frustrate your cat and increase the degree of difficulty as they become adept at solving them. See www.foodpuzzlesforcats.com for more ideas.

Hiding spots

Cats need a quiet place they can retreat to if they get stressed. Provide your cat with an igloo bed or a box they can hide in if they need time out. Ensure any unsuitable hiding spots, like behind the fridge or under the stove, are closed off. This will minimise the risk to your cat and encourage the use of hiding spots you have provided. It is also a great idea to make use of vertical space within your home. Cats love escaping to a high platform which enables them to look down on their world.

Soft toys

Many cats enjoy their own special teddy bear or soft toy. A stressed cat might benefit from a lavender-filled pillow. Try not to wash these too frequently – regularly vacuum or use a sticky-roller to remove excess fur. The cat derives comfort from their own scent being on the toy. A soft toy is also a useful travelling companion when your cat has to visit the vet or go into boarding.

Scratch posts

Cats need to scratch in order to keep their claws healthy. Provide your cat with a scratch post, or a few, to save your furniture! There is a huge selection available, some are multi-level with elevated hiding places or cat activity centres attached. Place scratch posts in the main areas of the house where your cat frequently passes. A scratch post tucked away in a corner will seldom be used.

Greenery

Provide your cat with some potted cat grass, catnip or cat mint. These can be grown inexpensively from seed, then transplanted into larger pots. Or start with young already established plants from your local nursery. Each of these varieties of feline-friendly greenery makes a lovely contribution to your home and will give your cat something delicious to nibble. Cats will naturally chew on the foliage as a way to aid their digestion. Keep one pot outdoors and one indoors, then rotate them as your cat munches up the indoor one.

An outside run

Veranda or balcony cat-nets are a simple and highly effective choice when installed from floor to rooftop. A range of netting products is available, with both commercial installation and DIY options. Specially designed cat safety nets are UV and chew resistant. Or build or purchase a specially-designed cat enclosure for your yard. See our factsheet on **cat-proof fencing** and enclosures for more information and suppliers.

Walk your cat

Cat harnesses are available for cats of all sizes. These fit around your cat's body and attach to a lead that lets you walk your cat safely outside. Keep in mind you should never attach a lead to a collar as you would with a dog, as a cat's throat is very sensitive and will be harmed by tugging on the collar.

Lead walking may be a great way for your cat to enjoy the outdoors, and a rewarding experience for both you and your cat. Please note that only particularly relaxed and outgoing cats may be trained to successfully walk with a harness and a lead, and only in an appropriate outdoor environment. Many cat personalities are simply NOT suited to this training. Remember that your cat depends on you for security and protection. See our factsheet on **harness and lead training** for more information.

Windows

Install a window seat or place a scratch post or piece of furniture under a window so your cat can look out. Cats love to sun themselves in the window and look at the world outside. Remember, light coloured cats are at risk of sunburn through the glass, so it may be necessary to take precautions for this. Also remember your cat will be happy looking out; this doesn't mean they want to get out. Most cats still try to pounce on bugs and birds through the glass.

Clean the litter tray

Cats are very clean animals with a very good sense of smell, so ensure that solid waste is removed from your cat's litter tray daily. Regularly clean the litter tray entirely as per instructions on the litter pack. Always keep the litter tray in a low traffic area. Cats, just like humans, would prefer to go to the toilet in private. If you place the litter tray in an area where people are walking past all the time your cat might not use it. Ensure the tray is the right size for your cat. Your cat should be able to turn around comfortably inside the tray and there should be enough space around the tray for your cat to have head room outside without bumping surrounding furniture. A large adult cat should not still be using the tray you bought for them as a kitten or toileting accidents are likely to happen. Litter trays should be equal to the number of cats in the home plus one extra tray. You might prefer litter trays with hoods to help minimise odours.

Spend time with your cat

Nothing beats spending quality time with your cat. Every cat has a different personality, so some might like just a few good pats or chin rubs while others will curl up with you for hours. Not all cats like to be picked up, and some become over-stimulated easily. Most cats love to bond through playtime, as well as through grooming and even conversation. Learn to 'read' what your cat is telling you. Cat owners are reported to have better communication skills than non-cat owners; this is thought to be because they have become more attuned to non-verbal communication cues.

Multi-cat household

For many cats the best way to keep them entertained indoors is by getting a second cat, or by adopting more than one cat in the first place. This will ensure your cat is never lonely and always has a playmate. Do keep in mind though that some cats prefer to be on their own, and it is very important to consider your cat's personality before adopting another cat. Adopt from a reputable source who can help identify for you which cats get on well with others or have lived with other cats before.

Stress

Signs of stress can include over-grooming and inappropriate toileting, aggression or withdrawal. However, these can also be indicators of serious illness so it is very important to contact your vet if you ever see signs of changed behaviour in your cat. Maintenance of routines is important for cats so try to keep a regular schedule. Also, be mindful that your cat sees your home as their territory and will scent-mark by scratching and rubbing their cheeks on surfaces. If your cat is not using their scratch post, it might simply be in the wrong place – watch where your cat scent marks. You will notice they tend to take the same pathways through your home. Move the objects you want them to mark, such as scratch posts, onto those pathways. Vacuum cats bedding regularly and hang it in sunlight but don't wash it too often: again, its familiar scent comforts your cat.