



ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT FOR INDOOR CATS

Keeping your cat indoors reduces her risk for injury and infectious disease. However, as we all know, it can be boring staying inside all of the time. The average cat spends 40% of the day sleeping, 22% resting, 15% grooming, 14% hunting, 3% traveling, and 2% feeding. Indoor cats no longer have the opportunity for hunting and traveling, so providing an interesting environment in the home helps to provide the stimulus your cat would normally receive if she lived outside. Providing an interesting and changing environment is extremely important for her mental health. Some ways to enhance her indoor home include:

- ✓ Providing access to a variety of places for her to explore and rest. Some things to try include constructing cat walks, adding cat “condos”, trees, tents, igloos, and/or tunnels to her house. Cats prefer to rest on elevated objects so try moving breakables and providing resting places on bookshelves. Shifting or adding pieces of furniture can provide more her with a variety of resting places. Regularly move her cat bed, scratching post or other modifications to provide her with a changing environment. This gives her an continuing motivation to explore.
- ✓ Dividing her meals into three or more portions and hiding them in various locations (e.g. corners, shelves, under/behind furniture), instead of feeding her in a single, regular location. Rotate the locations to keep things interesting. Finding a favorite food item will motivate her to hunt for her meals. You can also try hiding her food/treats in feeding balls and food puzzles. For example:
 - ★ a toilet tissue tube taped at one end with canned/wet food pasted inside the other end
 - ★ a toilet tissue tube with dry kibble and several pieces of freeze-dried liver, chicken, shrimp, or fish placed inside, taped at both ends, with several holes punched through the wall of the tube, allowing the food to fall out as she plays with the toy
 - ★ a hollow container (e.g. Kitty Kong) with canned food placed in it
 - ★ canned food can also be offered in a timed feeder. Be sure to vary the time at which the food becomes available.
- ✓ Making appropriate materials for scratching and resting available. Some examples of scratching materials include firewood logs, cardboard scratching mats and carpeted scratching posts. Materials for resting include fleece-like materials, micro fiber, taffeta, burlap, felt, fake furs, and down bedding. Catnip may be intermittently sprinkled on these surfaces to motivate her to explore potential resting surfaces.
- ✓ Providing a variety of toys. Provide only a few toys at a time and rotate them to keep her interested. When selecting toys, choose those which offer varieties sensory input. Include interactive toys to provide environmental as well as social enrichment.

Taken from Vint Virga, DVM