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VETERINARY
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Environmental Enrichment: Enhancing Your Cat's Quality of Life From the American Association of Feline Practitioners

Providing an Enriched Environment can increase activity, decrease mental stagnation, and prevent behavior problems. Cats need mental stimulation. An enriched environment gives cats opportunities to create their own positive experiences.

Vertical Space is highly desirable for cats and increases the overall space available to them. Provide cat trees, preferably with hiding spots, cat perches, and shelves.

Scratching is Normal Cat Behavior. Provide acceptable scratching materials (e.g., scratching posts). To train your cat to use the post, reward with treats and praise. Also put catnip, treats, and toys on or near the post. Scratching posts should be sturdy, and made of materials cats prefer (usually wood, sisal rope, or rough fabric). Locate the scratching post next to a window, sleeping area, or another favorite area. Many cats prefer vertical scratching posts; some prefer horizontal ones.

Interactive Toys and Hunting Games allow cats to stalk and catch; play several times a day with solitary indoor cats.

Keep the Home Environment predictable, but without rigidity or boredom. Make small changes that provide novelty. Studies indicate that cats play best and most often with toys that also use human interaction. Rotated or new toys hold cats' curiosity and interest for longer periods of time.

Cats in the Wild eat 10-20 small meals per day. By making all food available in the bowl, foraging time for indoor cats has been reduced to a few minutes per day, in contrast to the hours needed for natural foraging. This contributes to obesity problems in cats, which can lead to various disorders, as well as early death.

To Make Feeding More Natural For Your Cat:

- Use food puzzles, interactive food toys, and/or food and treat balls.
- Make homemade food puzzles from a cardboard box or a plastic beverage bottle with holes cut into it.
- Hide food in different places, and in or around new household objects so that cats can "hunt" for their food.

Social Companionship is important to cats because cats are social animals. Social companionship can take the form of gentle petting and stroking, feeding, grooming, and play. If cat owners are away for a large part of the day, it may be helpful for their cat to have another cat to interact with.

Preventing Startle: To enhance a cat's coping skills, make regular small changes in the environment to provide novelty. For anticipated changes in the family such as adding a new pet or baby, prepare the environment and introduce the cat gradually to these changes. For example, when moving, first introduce the cat to a small, comfortable space in the new place, which has been stocked with favorite items such as toys or the owner's clothing. When the cat has adjusted to this environment, gradually increase the new space available to the cat.

Cats Can Be Trained and Enjoy the Associated Attention

- Cats can learn to "sit", "come", and perform a variety of other tricks. Start with things your cat already likes to do.
- Reward cats with treats or positive attention to encourage desired behavior. Redirect undesired behavior.
- Do not punish; don't swat, slap, or yell at the cat.
- Train under calm, fun conditions using positive reinforcement (e.g., treats, toys, massage, praise).
- You can also train your cat to allow teeth brushing, nail trimming, and grooming.