

## WHAT MAKES YOUR CAT HAPPY

While each cat is an individual, there are many characteristics of cats that often surprise people. By catering to their preferences as much as possible you enhance their quality of life, and decrease their stress.

### FOOD

In the wild cats normally eat 10-20 small meals a day, and spend about 6 hours hunting. You can try to achieve this in your home:

- Have multiple food bowls throughout the house in a variety of rooms and elevations. Change things up periodically by moving them around.
- Food toys keep cats physically active and mentally stimulated. Food toys can be purchased or home made (shoe boxes with holes cut in the sides for reaching in, empty egg cartons, cardboard centers of paper towel rolls, etc).
- Automatic feeders that dispense very small portions frequently throughout the day

Cats that can simulate normal “hunting” behaviors (such as Doc & Phoebe’s Indoor Hunting Toys) get increased exercise, reduced boredom, and a lower chance of obesity.

Most cats prefer eating in privacy, out of visual sight of other cats.



### WATER

You may be surprised to learn that many cats prefer:

- Water to be in a different location than their food
- Drinking out of a tall receptacle such as a sturdy flower vase
- Flowing water
  - Drinking from faucets
  - Drinking from fountains. Either animal fountains sold at pet stores or small decorative fountains for people. Just make sure it can be cleaned periodically.

### FRIENDS

In the wild cats tend to live in small social groups or colonies. Strangers are not welcome. So many cats do not like it when you bring a new cat into their “territory.” If you are going to bring a new cat into your home, the following are most likely to get along:

- Adults are more likely to accept juveniles
- Two males are more likely to get along than two females
- Siblings
- Queen and her kittens

Your solo cat may actually be happier being an only child!

### PLAY

Toys are very important to keep cats mentally stimulated and physically fit. Many types of toys allow them to practice natural hunting behaviors. But cats, just like people, get bored of the same toys so it is important to regularly rotate toys. New toys from time to time are good, but old toys that have been put away for a month can be “new” when taken out again a month later. And don’t forget about all the free toys that cats love – hiding in boxes, batting crumpled paper, etc.

## LITTER BOXES

There are lots of litter boxes for sale that appeal to people, but are a terrible choice from the cat's perspective. Litter boxes should be:

- Large: at least as long as from the tip of their nose to the tip of their tail. Clear plastic underbed storage boxes often work well.
- Clean: scoop daily, completely dump and clean at least every 2 weeks. Just use warm water and soap – avoid strong smelling products like Lysol and PineSol. Boxes need to be completely replaced every 6-12 months depending on use.
- Easily accessible: if it's hard to get to they won't use it
- Open: avoid hoods and locate them in areas where they can see who is coming. Cats don't like being ambushed by other pets (or young children) while doing their business.
- Filled with a couple inches of unscented clumping litter. Most cats don't like "pearls", pine, corn, or automated cleaning boxes. etc.
- Plentiful: there should be one more litter box than number of cats in the home and they should be spaced around the home in different locations.

## RESTING AREAS

- Elevated perches: A very confident relaxed cat will nap on the floor, but most cats LOVE being up high. Your household furniture elevates them somewhat, but even better are cat trees and condos that really let them get above other pets and people. Keep in mind older cats may not be able to jump and climb as well, and may need "stairs" to get to their desired destination.
- Cats need quiet too. Some cats like sleeping in out-of-the-way locations such as in closets or in boxes.



## SCRATCHING

This is a natural behavior that cannot be stopped, but rather should be directed to locations that work better for us. Cats need:

- Vertical scratching surfaces. Here height matters. Cats like to stand on their back legs and reach up as high as they can. Most of the free standing vertical scratching posts for sale at pet stores are way too short. Instead pick a cat tree with scratching surfaces built in as part of the support posts, or there are also varieties that can be hung from door knobs.
- Horizontal scratching surfaces.
- Scratching areas that are centrally located in the home.
- A surface that they like. Preferences range from sisal rope, to carpet, to cardboard.

## RESOURCES

Resources are things that cats value: resting areas, food, water, attention, bathroom areas. Most cats are not good at sharing and want their own resources. If you have multiple cats and not enough resources for each, problems will ensue.

If you are having any problems with cats getting along, providing each type of resource in different parts of the house is important. If you can't put them in different rooms or levels of the house, even having visual barriers (such as a large piece of furniture) in between the resources can be helpful.

By knowing what cats like, we can provide them with an enriched, stress-free environment.