



Meeting the Needs of an Indoor Cat

Keeping Cats Indoors

Normally cats roam throughout large areas and spend their time exploring and hunting within their environment. For cats that are kept indoors, the lack of ability to engage in these activities as well as the lack of complexity within the household environment can cause stress, frustration, and boredom. Experiencing these emotions is not only upsetting to your cat, but could actually lead to additional health problems. It is extremely important to make sure your household environment can meet all of his behavioural needs. This guide will give you some useful tips and advice on how to make your home the perfect place for your new furry friend.

Setting up your house for an indoor cat

Keeping an indoor only cat – while very rewarding – requires a fair bit more preparation and vigilance than keeping a cat that can freely roam outdoors. Since your cat will be confined to just your home from now on, consider allowing him to have access to your whole house or at least several rooms, rather than just a single area.

Safety

The first step to keep in mind when setting up your home for a new indoor cat is to ensure that your cat is not able to escape and roam outdoors. This means ensuring that all your windows are properly closed, and that any cat flaps from previous cats are removed or blocked off. All members of the household, as well as visitors, will need to be mindful when opening main doors so that your cat does not sneak past you or run out between your legs. Some people find that installing a second screen door in addition to their main doors is helpful in preventing this. Installing screens on windows can also be considered to allow fresh air into the house but still prevent your cat from jumping out.



Once your home is secured for keeping your cat indoors, you must also make sure that the indoor environment is safe from any hazards that your cat might come in contact with. This involves making sure that all your houseplants are cat friendly, that any human foods that may be toxic for cats are stored in areas that your cat cannot access. Also ensure that any other potential hazards, like washing machines and tumble dryers that the cat could climb into, are closely monitored.

Feeding and Drinking

Although many people like setting up a “dining area” for their cats with their food and water bowls close together, cats actually much prefer to drink in areas separate from where they eat. Cats also prefer to drink from running water rather than still water, as in the wild this would be far cleaner. Although special cat water fountains which allow for this are available, most cats are okay with regular water bowls as long as their water is changed frequently and does not become dirty.

Since your cat will have limited opportunities to hunt and may quickly become bored, you should feed your cat through various enrichment/puzzle feeders rather than using a simple bowl. This will keep his mind active, allow him to engage in natural behaviours, and give him some exercise. Some of these enrichment feeders can be purchased in pet supply shops or online, but many are very easy and cheap to make at home. Please see the section on *Allowing Natural Behaviours* further below for some ideas.

Litter trays

Much like humans, cats prefer a bit of privacy in their toileting areas, so consider purchasing a litter tray that has a cover. Make sure it is big enough that your cat is able to fully turn around as well as dig to cover up their waste whilst inside. Litter trays should be placed well away from feeding, drinking, and sleeping areas, preferably in an area of the home that is less busy, but still easily accessible by your cat.

Some cats can be a bit picky about the type of litter used in their tray. In general, you should avoid scented litter or litter that has a strong cleaner smell. If your cat does not like one type, try changing to a different brand (generally finer sand litter is preferred to the large clumping kind), but once you do find one he is happy with, it is best to stick with it as cats can be sensitive to change and may be put off from using the litter tray if the type of litter is changed suddenly and often. Clean out your cat's litter tray frequently to encourage your cat to continue using it and to minimise the smell within your home.

Cat Furniture

Because your indoor cat will be cut off from the outdoors – and all the opportunities for engaging with different environments that come with it – it is recommended that you add some cat “furniture” to your home to allow appropriate surfaces for your new cat to perform the natural behaviours they would normally perform outdoors. Not providing your cat with his own “furniture” to perform these activities (like scratching and climbing) will unfortunately not stop your cat from doing them – he'll just do them on your regular furniture, which generally ends up being more costly and frustrating in the long-run. Luckily, more and more companies are producing more sightly and ergonomic cat furniture supplies, so adding these to your home does not have to upset the style of your home and can be integrated seamlessly into your furniture. The section below on *Allowing Natural Behaviours* will go into more detail on the type of cat furniture that you should consider.



Pheromones

Cats have an incredible sense of smell and use scents to communicate with themselves and others. Because living as an indoor cat might be a bit stressful for your new cat at first, there are some scent products available that may help your cat adjust to the indoor lifestyle. Pheromones are specific types of scents produced by cats' bodies that can provide various emotional messages, such as reassurance. Spreading these pheromones is part of the reason cats like to rub their faces on various surfaces and people. One way to help your new cat feel safer and more comfortable in their new home is by using a synthetic version of this pheromone called *FELIWAY*. This is available both as a diffuser, which can be plugged in to release the pheromone throughout a room (don't worry - it

cannot be detected by humans) or as a spray, to spray onto specific locations like the cat's bed. Another pheromone product called *FELISCRATCH* can also be used to encourage cats to scratch on appropriate surfaces, rather than on your walls or furniture.

Allowing Natural Behaviours

Cats are complex creatures who naturally engage in a wide variety of behaviours. Not allowing cats to perform behaviours that they are highly motivated to do can lead to boredom and frustration, not to mention significant stress. Because of this, it is important to adapt your house to allow your new cat to engage in normal feline behaviours as much as possible.

Climbing and Jumping

Cats are naturally very agile climbers and feel safest when they are able to observe the world from high up. Being able to exercise their climbing and jumping muscles is also essential for keeping your cat fit and healthy. A variety of structures are available to allow cats to engage in these activities. These include cat towers, cat shelves, radiator beds, hanging hammocks, or even just putting blankets/cat beds on top of wardrobes and allowing cats to have access to these. Cats particularly like resting high up, so make sure there are some nice vertical spaces that are comfortable and wide enough for your cat to lie down on safely without falling off.

Hunting and Playing

It may seem like hunting is a behaviour that would be difficult to replicate in an indoor environment, but in reality many games and feeding enrichment opportunities allow cats to use the same skills and movements that they would practise if they were hunting for real outdoors. For example, by using a fishing rod toy (a slender stick with a string attached to it, often with a small toy or feather tied to it) you can entice your new cat to stalk, chase, and pounce. You can even use it to encourage your cat to jump along various vertical spaces. Simply flicking small treats across the floor in an unpredictable pattern will also encourage your cat to be active and chase after the small moving targets. This can also be done with various cat toys, or even just some paper or kitchen foil made into a ball. There are also motorised toys available that move around on their own so your cat can chase after it.



There are many independent activities that replicate different aspects of hunting that your cat can engage in on his own. Tossing two or three ping-pong balls into a (dry) bathtub and encouraging your cat to swat and chase after them for example can keep a cat active and entertained for a fair bit of time. Feeding-games and devices are also great for this and can and should be used instead of a standard food bowl. While a wide variety of feeding enrichment products are available commercially (see for example Kitty Kongs, cat treat balls, or activity boards) there are many easy and cheap ones you can make from common household items. For example, taping together cardboard toilet rolls and placing food inside each one or even just scattering food in empty egg cartons or empty biscuit trays, is a cheap way to both recycle and to encourage your cat to use problem-solving skills and engage their paw dexterity. Wrapping bits of cat food into crumpled paper balls will encourage your cat to rip and tear, much like if they were dissecting a kill. Hiding food in play tunnels or cardboard

boxes could be a way of encouraging your cat to use his sense of smell to locate food. Cutting a few holes into a tennis ball, or even an empty plastic bottle, and then filling it with cat food/treats is another great way to keep your cat active and engaged during feeding – he will need to practise batting the ball/bottle around and chasing after it to get the bits of food to come out through the holes.

Scratching

Cats love scratching for a variety of reasons: it allows them to stretch out properly and keep their claws in good condition; it lets them spread their scent onto familiar areas through scent glands that are between their pads; and it keeps their climbing muscles fit and ready for action. It's best to set up a variety of scratching posts around your home, particularly next to areas where your cat likes to sleep, as often cats will start scratching shortly after waking up. Make sure the posts are tall enough that your cat can fully stretch out and that they won't fall over when your cat is using them. If you find that your cat prefers scratching your furniture instead of his scratching posts, you can encourage him to scratch his posts by spraying a pheromone called *FELISCRATCH* onto them. It may also help to place the posts directly next to the furniture that he was scratching. There are even some scratching boards available that can be hung onto existing furniture.



Hiding

Although cats are excellent predators, they still enjoy being able to hide away and to be out of sight, both to stalk and observe the world, as well as to feel safe when they are unsure of things going on in their environment. Providing hiding spaces also gives your cat the opportunity to be out of sight and take a break from interacting when they feel the need. One of the simplest hiding spaces to provide



for cats is the humble cardboard box. Whether just left open on the ground, or placed upside down with some entrance/exit holes cut into it, cardboard boxes are a firm favourite with many cats. Igloo style hiding beds are also available commercially. Some cats are also happy to just hide under beds or sofas, in which case you could make this more comfortable for them by adding a small blanket to places they frequently hide. It is important to not prevent your cat from hiding away if he feels the need to do so. If your cat is hiding in a place that is unacceptable to you, make sure you provide suitable alternatives and encourage your cat to use them, before

blocking off the area.

Socialising

Most cats do enjoy social interaction so be sure to spend some quality time with your cat each day. This could be through playing interactive games together, for example with a fishing rod toy or by flicking treats around for him to chase, or by simply having a nice cuddle and stroking him in areas he is comfortable with. While some cats do tolerate more intense forms of handling, cats generally do not enjoy being smothered or trapped in hugs. Cats can also be very particular about having their bellies rubbed, so make sure you watch your cat's body language to assess whether he is truly

enjoying the activity. Most cats also enjoy being spoken to and many can even be trained to perform tricks. These are all activities that will help fill the social needs of your cat and will strengthen your relationship with him.

Other Enrichment

While the sections above will cover the major areas of your cat's behavioural needs, there are always additional forms of enrichment you can add to your cat's life to make his day-to-day experiences within your home more interesting. These include things like playing audio recordings of bird songs, bringing some outdoor objects like pine cones, feathers, or crumpled leaves in a box for him to smell, or creating a small enclosed outdoor run for him to spend some time outside in. Providing him with some catnip, either fresh or dried, is another great form of enrichment. If practical, setting up bird/squirrel feeders in view of windows could also give your cat something interesting to watch from indoors. Many cats also enjoy watching fish in fish tanks. Engaging all of your cat's different senses (sight, smell, touch, hearing, taste) will keep him from experiencing boredom and may reduce stress. There are many great ideas for indoor cats online, which can be found by simply searching for the term "cat enrichment ideas."

Summary

- You must secure your home so that your cat is unable to escape
- Make sure your home is free from any potential hazards like toxic houseplants
- Keep your cat's feeding area separate from his drinking area
- Make sure your cat's litter tray is large enough for him to turn around and is in a quiet place
- Consider adding some cat furniture to your home so your cat can climb and exercise
- Synthetic pheromones like *FELIWAY* may help your new cat settle into your home
- Make sure you have vertical resting spaces for your cat to rest somewhere high up
- Feeding your cat through enrichment feeders is much better than a bowl
- Keep your cat active with games and toys that encourage hunting behaviours
- Set up scratching posts around your home to keep your cat's claws healthy (and to protect your furniture!)
- Make sure your home has ample hiding spaces for your cat – cardboard boxes are great
- Spend quality time with your cat every day – you are his only social contact
- Incorporate new forms of enrichment frequently to keep your cat's life interesting

