

## **ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT ENHANCES QUALITY OF LIFE FOR YOUR CAT**

### **Providing an Enriched Environment:**

Will increase activity, decrease mental stagnation and prevent many behaviour problems. Cats require mental stimulation. An enriched environment will give cats the opportunities to create their own positive experiences.

### **Vertical Space:**

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

### **Scratching is Normal Cat Behaviour:**

Provide acceptable scratching materials (ie: 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 must be sturdy and made of materials that cats prefer (usually wood, sisal rope, or rough fabric). Locate the scratching post next to a window, sleeping area, or another favourite area. Many cats will prefer a vertical scratching post over a horizontal one.

### **Interactive Toys and Hunting Games:**

Allow cats to stalk and catch; play several times a day with solitary indoor cats.

### **Keep the home Environment:**

The home environment should be predictable, but without rigidity or boredom. Make small changes that provide novelty. Studies indicate that cats play best and most often with toys which also use human interaction. Rotated or new toys hold cat's curiosity and interest for longer periods of time.

### **Cats in the Wild:**

In the wild it is typical for a cat to eat 10-20 small meals per day. By making all food available in the bowl, foraging time for indoor cats will be reduced to a few minutes per day, as compared to the hours for natural foraging. Lack of foraging means a lack of activity, which contributes to the obesity problem seen in cats. Obesity leads to various disorders, as well as early death.

### **To Make Feeding More Natural for the Cat:**

Incorporate food puzzles, interactive food toys and/or food balls. Make homemade food puzzles from a cardboard box or a plastic beverage bottle with holes cut into it. Try hiding food in different areas around the house, and in or around new objects so that cats can "hunt" for their food. Boxes, bags and carriers that are left out provide nice hiding places for cats. Outdoor enclosures for cats protect them from injury while still allowing outdoor exposure.

### **Social Companionship:**

Cats are social animals. Cats need companionship and mental stimulation. Social companionship can be in 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. Do not let your kitten or cat bite your hands or feet. If your kitten is doing this, substitute a toy to bite on instead. In a multiple cat household, set up several stations, with litter boxes, food and water, throughout the home. With critical resources available at more than one site, a cat can choose which path to take, and which cat to greet or avoid.

**Prevent Startle:**

To enhance the 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. This space should be stocked with favourite items such as toys or the owners 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:**

Reward cats with treats or positive attention to encourage desired behaviour. Redirect undesirable behaviour; never punish, swat, slap or yell at the cat. Train under calm, fun conditions using positive reinforcement (ie: treats, toys, massage, praise). Cats can learn to "sit", "come" and do a variety of other tricks. Start with things your cat already likes to do. You can also train your cat to allow teeth brushing, nail trimming and grooming.

(The above information is from the American Association of Feline Practitioners)