

Emotionally and Physically Healthy Cats



Volume 1: Issue 3

April 2013

By Dr. Tara Koble, Boise, Idaho

We all want what is absolutely best for our cats. This is exactly why many of us have chosen to keep our cats mostly indoors. This does ensure their safety by reducing the chance of injury and disease, but there are also health risks associated with this lifestyle. Cats in the wild are very active and are mentally stimulated by their surroundings. This is very different from how the typical indoor cat lives. Lack of exercise and minimal mental stimulation causes physical and emotional stress.

The typical indoor cat may not seem to be under stress...or is he or she? Chronic stress is thought to play a role in some of the common inflammatory diseases of cats such as interstitial cystitis (sterile inflammation of the bladder) and inflammatory bowel disease (chronic vomiting or diarrhea). We recommend that you enrich the home environment of your cat. These positive changes will help replace the stimulation, activity, complexity, and choices that outdoor cats enjoy daily. This article will address the 5 categories of basic life needs, and how to adapt them into an indoor cat's life.

First, **territory** is of utmost importance to most cats. Even though some cats are very social, they are independent creatures by nature and need a space of their own where they feel safe. Each cat should have his or her own space, complete with a separate litter box, separate feeding station, and a separate space to spend time or sleep. Even though some cats may be ok with sharing space, you still need to

provide this option.

Second, cats in the wild hunt for their **food**. This is where they get most of their exercise as well as their water requirements. By keeping cats indoors, we have created a situation where they must only walk into the next room to eat. They no longer have to work for their food and are much more sedentary than their outside counterparts. They tend to consume too many calories for their activity level. This can be from the overfeeding of treats, free feeding, boredom, or eating high carbohydrate foods. Cats in the wild may eat up to 20 small meals in a day. However, they watch, listen, stalk, jump, chase, and pounce for every meal.

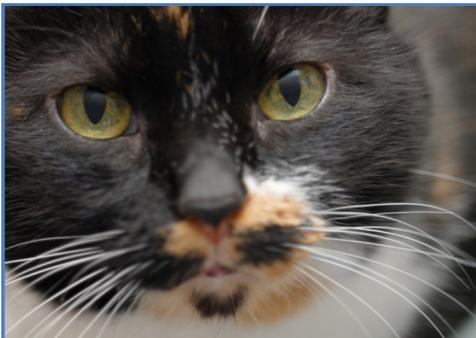
Third, cats need a **sleeping** space that is quiet and safe. Many cats like to be alone when they sleep, either curled up in or under something or often up high where they are safe and can watch their surroundings. Providing a choice of sleeping areas is ideal. Let your cat choose. If your cat chooses somewhere to sleep, there is probably a reason...try to be accommodating if at all possible. Sometimes this means having cat beds as part of the décor.

Fourth, many indoor cats are lacking in **exercise** and entertainment. It is not only important in maintaining physical health, but staying active is healthy for their emotional state as well. Luckily, this is easy to encourage. Scratching posts or climbing areas are desirable to most cats for several reasons. They need a place to scratch, scratching not only helps remove old nails but it provides for full body stretches and muscle flexing. It is important to offer your cats a variety of scratching options. Try both horizontal and vertical scratching toys as well as different substrates such as sisal rope, carpet, cardboard, and wood. Cats like to scratch and stretch as soon as they wake up, so placing a scratching post near their favorite sleeping spot can increase compliance. Cats have a natural tendency to want to watch their surroundings while feeling safe



and hidden at the same time. Plant some flowers that attract bees and butterflies outside windows or install a planter box. Consider a bird feeder, birdbath, or squirrel feeder as well. Playing with your cat is the best form of exercise and will stimulate them mentally. Cats get bored with toys easily, so make sure you rotate the toys every 1-2 weeks. Some easy and cost effective toys to add to the rotation would be: paper grocery bags to play in, large cardboard boxes filled with crumpled paper to hide in, and catnip stuffed socks. Interactive things that involve both play and exercise include dragging a long shoelace on the floor, hang a toy from the doorknob, throw dry kibble across the floor, play hide and seek with your cat, and playing with a ping pong ball in the bathtub.

In the wild, cats void in a new clean spot every time. The **litter box**, we provide is not at all like what they would choose outdoors in their natural environment. The goal is to make sure the cat box is the most attractive place so they will not be tempted to go somewhere else in the house. Attractiveness to a cat includes cleanliness, safety, and convenience.



Why all the Wellness Talk?



As the practice of medicine, both human and veterinary, has evolved over time, physicians increasingly share a philosophy of promoting wellness. But what does wellness really mean? This mindset of wellness and prevention means that doctors are looking to provide care for their patients before the worst has already happened, and put into play supportive measures that can delay, if not completely prevent the onset of illness and disease, especially those related to aging and the environment. Each veterinarian's primary goal is to allow your pet to have the best quality of life

feasible for as long as possible. The tools a veterinarian has available to achieve this can range from simple regular routine examinations and vaccinations to more complex nutritional and pharmaceutical support. Wellness examinations do not necessarily mean that your pet is going to be subjected to a barrage of complicated medical tests and treatments. Some animals may need close monitoring of blood work, x-rays or other tests or many pets benefit simply from being physically examined, having their heart and lungs listened to and their general health assessed. Thus preventing a health issue from developing undetected.

A general health assessment before surgery can help prevent complications and assure a speedy recovery. Ask your veterinarian for guidance in developing a plan for your cats health care to give you as many years as possible with your cat companions.

“Each veterinarian's primary goal is to allow your pet to have the best quality of life feasible for as long as possible.”

Wellness Exam & Vaccines

- One per cat
- Must be presented for coupon to be honored
- Valid thru 7/31/2013
- May not be combined with other offers/coupons
- Cannot be used as payment or redeemed for cash.

Code: FELNEWS

