



## Meeting a cat's needs

It is difficult for cat caregivers to provide enough stimulation of indoor-living cats. When behavioural needs are not met, cats can develop chronic anxiety, resulting in behaviour problems and physical health issues.

### Offering feeding stations, water sources and litter trays

Water and food should never be near the litter. The cat's water source should also be offered at a significant distance from the cat's food. In the natural setting, a cat would eat its food away from water and would not contaminate water with its prey. If you have more than one cat, follow the N+1 rule, where N is the number of cats. This rule states that there should be one litter tray, one water bowl and one feeding station for every cat in the home, as well as one extra litter tray, water bowl and feeding station. These resources should not be in the same place.

Cats often prefer running water. Many cats prefer to drink out of a ceramic bowl compared to plastic. Metal is least preferred.

Activity feeding is a way to improve mental stimulation for cats and can better meet their need to "work" for their food. Cats have evolved to spend a significant time of their day hunting. Some cats respond well to having all their food delivered in food toys. When you first introduce any food toy to your cat, continue to offer some food in a bowl, so the cat does not become too hungry and frustrated if they don't understand how to get food from the toys. Monitor the cat's interaction with the food toys. The challenge should be low when initially offering the toy, so that the cat can learn to use it.

Most cats need litter trays that are much larger than those offered by human caregivers. Cats prefer to have a litter tray that is at least 1.5 times their actual length. The litter depth should be about 2-3cm. The litter should be scooped daily and the tray cleaned once a week. Some cats may need the litter tray cleaned more frequently.

## Toys and play

Cat play is explosive and comes in bursts. Play should always be directed at toys. Encouraging kittens to direct play at hands or feet can be a problem for caregivers when the cat is older.

Toys offered to cats should allow the opportunity for the cat to occasionally “catch” the toy. When using a laser toy, cat’s cannot “catch” the beam, which can lead to frustration. In some cats, this can be a problem.

## Social interaction

Many cats enjoy social interaction with their human caregiver. Some cats love to be scratched, particularly around the head and behind the ears. Some cats love to be with their owners but do not actually enjoy a scratch. The cat’s behaviour will let you know. If your cat is looking away a lot or moving away or flicking the tail, it is possible that the cat does not like being patted. Some cats like spending time lying near their caregiver but they do not necessarily want to be scratched.

Cats are a solitary species. Although they sometimes get along well with other cats, particularly their littermates or other cats with whom they are related, introducing a new cat into a household can often be a problem. In general, adult cats do not welcome new playmates and may prefer social time with their human caregiver.

## Safe places

Cats like access to high up places where they can safely look at any intruders from up high. All cats should have the availability of hiding places. As well as being a predator, they are also natural prey to many species so cats have evolved the need to flee and hide as a first defence. Climbing and hiding are the natural defence of a cat.

## Scratching

Scratching is a natural, maintenance behaviour of cats. If a cat does not have an appropriate scratch mat or scratching post available in a useful location for the cat, then the cat may start to scratch the furniture and the carpet. The purpose of scratching (for the cat) is that it lets others see and scent the cat’s presence in the area, and also helps improve the health of their claws and stretch the cat’s muscles.