



From time to time the AAFP will respond to emerging new knowledge or issues that are of concern to veterinary professionals caring for cats. Our position statements, which represent the views of the association, are available at: www.catvets.com/professionals/guidelines/position/

AAFP Position Statement

Environmental enrichment for indoor cats

Cats are highly intelligent, naturally curious and active creatures that we have chosen to take into our homes as pets. In order to respect the natural behavioral tendencies of the cat we are obligated to provide a suitably stimulating environment. The American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) encourages appropriate environmental enrichment (EE) to obtain and preserve optimal physical and mental health of our feline family members. Providing the proper environment increases the chances of living in harmony alongside these phenomenal creatures for years of enjoyment. Another positive effect of providing EE is a decreased number of surrendered/unwanted cats due to what may be undesired or perceived as inappropriate behavior(s).

Many behavioral and physical disorders that are seen in cats are often secondary to stress from lack of appropriate stimulation. Environmental enrichment should be part of the overall treatment plan for these disorders. As part of the wellness exam, it is the responsibility of the veterinarian to discuss the current state of the environment and to provide resources for EE to indoor-cat owners. It is well known that if an appropriate environment is not provided for indoor cats, they are at greater risk of stress-induced illnesses and conditions such as:

- ❖ Feline lower urinary tract disease.^{1,2}
- ❖ Obesity.³
- ❖ Different forms of aggression.⁴
- ❖ Overgrooming and other compulsive disorders.⁵
- ❖ Upper respiratory infection.^{6,7}

In an attempt to prevent the above conditions, it should become routine for the veterinary team to inform owners of the importance of EE and to provide resources to owners. It is also important to consider EE in shelter cats for the same reasons.

To be successful with EE, there are several things that must be considered. If the owner is already experiencing what they regard as behavioral problems, a thorough medical evaluation should be



Vertical spaces, play areas and a window all help to enrich the indoor cat's environment

performed. Once any medical conditions have been ruled out, properly identified and/or addressed, then one can move forward with an EE plan.

In order to design and implement an appropriate EE plan for an individual, the following should be determined:

- ❖ The life stage of the cat(s).⁸
- ❖ The degree of socialization of the individual(s).⁹
- ❖ If any medical conditions exist and, if so, the limitations/challenges of the particular condition(s).
- ❖ Whether the cat reacts to a situation in an active or passive manner.²
- ❖ Whether the cat is frustrated, fearful, or anxious.²
- ❖ If any undesired behavior is a natural or a reactive behavior.²

It is imperative to prevent stress in multiple cat households by providing

multiple sets of essential resources.

Such resources would include but not necessarily be limited to:

- ❖ Food.
- ❖ Water.
- ❖ Litterboxes.
- ❖ Toys.
- ❖ 'Safe' places.
- ❖ Vertical space.

References

- 1 Westropp JL, Buffington CAT. Feline idiopathic cystitis: current understanding of pathophysiology and management. *Vet Clin Small Anim* 2004; **34**: 1043-55.
- 2 Ellis SLH. Environmental enrichment. Practical strategies for improving feline welfare. *J Feline Med Surg* 2009; **11**: 901-2.
- 3 Buffington CAT. External and internal influences on disease risk in cats. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2002; **220**: 994-1002.
- 4 Herron ME, Buffington CAT. Environmental enrichment for indoor cats. *Compend Contin Educ Pract Vet* 2010; **32**: E1-E5.
- 5 Landsberg GM, Hunnhausen WL, Ackerman LJ. Handbook of behavior problems of the dog and cat. Vol 1. Philadelphia: Elsevier, 1997: 195-204.
- 6 McCobb EC, Patronek GJ, Marder A, Dinnage JD, Stone MS. Assessment of stress levels among cats in four animal shelters. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2005; **226**: 548-55.
- 7 Edwards DS, Coyne K, Dawson S, et al. Risk factors for time to diagnosis of feline upper respiratory tract disease in UK animal adoption shelters. *Prev Vet Med* 2008; **87**: 327-39.
- 8 Vogt AH, Rodan I, Brown M, et al. AAFP-AAHA Feline Life Stage Guidelines. *J Feline Med Surg* 2010; **12**: 43-54.
- 9 Crowell-Davis SL, Curtis TM, Knowles J. Social organization in the cat: a modern understanding. *J Feline Med Surg* 2004; **6**: 19-28.

Visit some of these online resources for specific ideas on how to achieve quality feline environmental enrichment:

- ❖ www.catvets.com/healthtopics/wellness/index.aspx?ID=213
- ❖ indoorpet.osu.edu/cats/
- ❖ indoorpet.osu.edu/cats/basicneeds/index.cfm
- ❖ www.fabcats.org/behaviour/cat_friendly_home/info.html
- ❖ maxshouse.com/Healthy+Happy_Indoors.htm
- ❖ www.humanesociety.org/news/magazines/2010/05-06/home_makeovers_to_meow_about.html

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