



Keep Your Cat Alert

By Tiffany Lutnick, Cat Program Supervisor

Cats of all ages need mental stimulation to keep them happy. This comes in the form of play and watching interesting events around them. These things help keep your kitty happy, healthy, and free of behavioral frustration problems. Here are some ideas to help keep your cat happy:

- Install a window perch: cats love to watch the things going on outside. Birds, squirrels, bugs and other creatures are frequent visitors to many homes and provide mental stimulation by exercising your cat's prey drive. Cats also love to perch in elevated places, so a window perch is the best of both worlds for your kitty!
- Simulate hunting with interactive toys: cats need to work off the energy they build up while watching birds and other smaller creatures outside. Interactive toys, also called fishing pole-type toys, are a great way to provide your kitty with the thrill of the hunt while keeping them safe indoors. Interactive toys simulate hunting and stalking that really give your cats a workout and the mental stimulation they crave. 'Da Bird' is a great toy with a special feather attachment that mimics the movements and sound of a bird in flight. Cat charmers are also a great toy that simulates a snake or other wiggly prey. Don't forget to let your cat catch the toy occasionally too – they need to experience the rewards of the hunt to feel satisfied for their efforts and continue wanting to play.
- Try a Peek-a-Prize: have you ever noticed that cats like to fish things out of tight quarters? The Peek-a-Prize toy is a shallow wooden box with small round holes cut into the top and sides of it. Balls, toy mice, or treats can be placed inside for your cat to fish out. Many cats love this type of game and can't resist seeing objects inside that they want and figuring out how to get them. This is great mental stimulation for a cat that is home alone often and if you're handy, you can even make a similar toy yourself out of wood or cardboard.
- Grow wheatgrass or catnip in a pot indoors: Many cats love the scent of fresh catnip and also eat wheatgrass to aid in their digestion. Both of these are easy to grow inside so your cat can enjoy them year-round. Seeds are easy to find for wheatgrass and catnip, or if you start in the spring, you can purchase small plants of catnip from a nursery and wheatgrass at your local health food store. Give your kitties a treat!
- Try catnip toys: about two-thirds of the cats in the U.S. are affected by catnip. Often, cats that don't seem interested in other types of play will be stimulated by catnip and enjoy rubbing, biting, chasing, and kicking the toy. Of course, many active cats will enjoy doing the same! Look for a toy that uses high-quality catnip

and has a tough exterior, like denim, to withstand all the attention it is sure to get!

- Arrange toys for when you are away: Cats love the excitement of interactive toys, but also enjoy playing on their own. There are many toys that encourage the cat to investigate and bat, swat or chase it and give your cat something to do while you are away or occupied. The Cat Dancer is a great toy that is made of wire and little bits of cardboard for your cat to swat at. For cats that love treats, the Kitty Kong has a hole at the bottom where a treat can be inserted for your cat to chase and try to get out. Plus, there are many toys around the house that cats love, like balls of crumpled paper and milk rings. Of course toy mice are always a hit, and if you put them in a bag of loose catnip, it may spark even more interest!
- Give your cat a bag: Most cats find it impossible to resist an empty paper bag. Just leave one sitting on the floor and watch your cat curl up inside, pounce on top, or perhaps both!
- Don't forget the scratching post: Cats need to scratch! Scratching stretches muscles in cats' arms and paws and also is a way of scent-marking. It is an important part of their lives that they need to be able to participate in. The best way to make sure your cat isn't scratching your furniture is to provide them with better alternatives located in places they like to be, like the living room or wherever you spend most of your time. Look for tall, upright scratching posts with a wide base. Cats like to scratch on something sturdy and if your scratching post falls over when the cat uses it, he isn't going to want to continue. Sisal, carpet, and rough, scratchy fabrics make great scratching post materials that cats can really sink their claws in to. Also try the inexpensive, horizontal cardboard scratchers. These often come with catnip to attract the cat to the scratcher and many cats love them.
- Put the toys away: Cats get bored with the same toys all the time, so rotate them! When you bring out new toys, put some of the older ones away. In a few weeks bring them out and it will be like having new toys all over again!
- Build an outdoor cat enclosure: For those of you that own your home and want to do something extra-special for your cat, think about building an outdoor enclosure to allow your cat to experience the outdoors whenever it wants, but stay safe. Many types of plans can be found online and the varieties of enclosures are endless. They do have several things in common though: they all have some sort of door that leads from the house to the enclosure and they are enclosed on all sides and the top by wire fencing. These are fun to look at, so try an online search and let your imagination run wild!