

Cats Just Want to Have Fun

In nature cats hunt (play), eat, and sleep. Domesticated cats often get an overabundance of eating and sleeping, but don't always have enough hunting (playing) opportunities. Boredom can sap a cat's energy (both mentally and physically) just as much as it can with humans. Interactive play is a very powerful tool that you can use to help your cat. It's great for exercise/weight control, stress relief, trust/confidence-building, helping two cats become friends, bonding with you as well as deterring inappropriate behaviors.

The concept is simple with YOU as the key ingredient. You'll need to have a "think like a cat" mentality that allows your cat to act like the athletic hunter she was born to be. Although there are several options a fishing pole-type toy is a great way to create prey-like action. Move the pole so the target at the end of the string can wiggle, slide, dart and creep around the room. When you move the toy like prey, it will stimulate the hunter in your cat. Alternate between fast and slow motions so it gives your cat time to plan her next move. Hunting is just as much mental as it is physical. (**Tip:** Movements that go away from or across your cat's visual field will trigger her prey drive. Don't dangle the toy in her face.) For interactive playtime to be beneficial your cat has to be able to plan her moves, and have successful captures. In the wild, cats often catch, lose, then re-catch their prey several times before finally killing and eating it. Allowing them to catch the prey helps with their self-confidence and suddenly yanking it away helps to keep them from getting too cocky! When playtime is over, give your kitty a treat. In the wild, once prey is finally caught and killed, the cat gets to eat. Giving them a treat at the end of play time mimics this natural behavior.

Maintain a regular schedule of interactive play with your cat. Your cat needs the consistency. Schedule playtime once or twice a day for about 15 minutes each. You'd be surprised what a ½ hour a day of playtime and fun can do for a cat's emotional and physical health as well as improve the bond between you and your cat. During interactive play, you can't help but to talk to your cat(s), voicing praise and encouragement, laughing at their antics and appreciating their gracefulness and powerful athleticism. Playing with cats is a happy activity that makes both you and your cats feel good, creating positive "vibes" that both you and your cats transmit to each other. You feel happier, they feel happier - it's a positive, happy time and healthy for all of you!

Interactive toys:

While you may have lots of toys around the house for your cat, the problem is that they're essentially "dead" prey. They don't move. The only way to create action is if your cat bats at them.

With the interactive play, however, she doesn't have to be both predator and prey – she can simply focus on being the hunter. There are many interactive toys available at your local pet store. Some are very basic – a pole with a string and a toy dangling on the end. Some are more complex and may require a battery to produce movements your cat will love. When shopping, try to match the toy to your cat's personality. If you have a somewhat timid cat, go for a toy that's more basic and easy for her to conquer. If you have a very confident, athletic cat, you can choose something more challenging.

Try a variety of toys to see which ones your cat prefers. Your cat may like toys that simulate birds such as toys that chirp, toys made of a bird-type substrate (feathers) or toys that create bird-like movements (fluttering toys). Other cats will prefer toys that mimic "catching small rodents", such as cat toys shaped like mice, toys that squeak, toys made of fur, or toys that have encourage jerking movements. They may also enjoy tossing, biting or carrying their "prey". Movements that simulate bug catching are also a

favorite play type of many cats. You can test this by giving your cat a kibble of food to chase, use a laser light on the floor or wall, or by playing with a string with a knot on the end and moving it quickly. (**Tip:** Follow using a laser light with a toy that your cat can actually catch, so they do not become frustrated)

Keep your cat's toys locked away where they can't get at them all the time and rotate the toys they get to play with. This goes for both interactive and solitary play toys. This helps to peak their interest and keep them from getting bored with the same old things.

While not the answer to everything, 15-30 minutes of interactive play every day, makes for a happy well adjusted cat. Many inappropriate behavior issues can be kept to a minimum or completely eliminated just by insuring that our cats get to practice their hunting skills every day! If you live with a single cat or a house full of cats, try adding play time as part of their daily routine and see for yourself how much better your cats feel and act!

