

CREATING CAT SERENITY

'Stress' can be associated with various illnesses in cats ranging from 'cat flu' and herpesvirus infections of the eyes, diseases of the urinary tract, skin and gastro-intestinal tract, and behavioural problems.

There are many ways to help reduce 'stress' in cats, often with quite simple changes.

'What has my cat got to be stressed about?!'

When we talk about stress in cats, it is not the same as with people. Cats don't have to juggle busy work and home lives and worry about paying bills, for example.

The most common things which can cause stress to a cat are:

- Other cats (inside or outside the house)
- Inappropriate or not enough resources
- Over-attention from humans, including children
- Fearful events (eg, a cat fight, vets visits!)
- Boredom
- Pain

To fully understand why these situations cause stress requires a more intense look into how cats have evolved, and how this affects their behaviour. Other resources are available if the reader wishes to look into this further e.g.

<https://icatcare.org/advice/understanding-your-cat>

The **FIVE PILLARS OF A HEALTHY FELINE ENVIRONMENT** gives us a framework against which we can assess if the environment our cats live in could be improved in any way.

1. PROVISION OF SAFE PLACES

2. PROVISION OF MULTIPLE & SEPERATED KEY RESOURCES

3. PROVISION OF THE OPPORTUNITY FOR PLAY AND PREDATORY BEHAVIOUR

4. PROVISION OF POSITIVE, CONSISTENT AND PREDICTABLE HUMAN-CAT SOCIAL INTERACTION

5. PROVISION OF AN ENVIRONMENT THAT RESPECTS THE IMPORTANCE OF A CAT'S SENSE OF SMELL

1. PROVISION OF SAFE PLACES

By nature, most cats will avoid confrontation with anything scary that might do them harm. Faced with something outside their comfort zone they will want to run away, hide, get up high, or all of the above! (depending on the cat, this could be something understandable like a noisy, strange person in the house, or for those sensitive souls, something as seemingly innocuous as a new pair of shoes!!). Having bolt holes – e.g. a cat tunnel behind the sofa; or access to heights – e.g. being able to climb up on top of a high cupboard, will help them have this sense of security. If you have children or dogs, it is even more important that the cat has somewhere it can go where it cannot be disturbed by either!

2. PROVISION OF MULTIPLE & SEPERATED KEY RESOURCES

Key resources are FOOD, WATER, TOILET AREAS, SLEEP/RESTING AREAS, SCRATCH POSTS. The resources shouldn't all be sited together in one small area of the house. None of these resources should be too near or within sight of a main entrance to the house (human door OR cat flaps!) or in open view from outside, such as right by a large window. As a minimum, there should be one more than the number of cats in the house, of each key resource (or more if you have the space!).

Food

Naturally, cats would eat 10-15 small meals a day, so giving only two square meals a day by comparison falls very short of a cat's natural behaviour. Using food puzzles, timed feeders and/or scatter feeding dry food, will help your cat have a more natural feeding behaviour, also ticking the box for 'provision of predatory behaviour' - see below. Check out <http://foodpuzzlesforcats.com/homemade-puzzles> for ideas of cheap homemade puzzles.

Water

Cats will drink more if the water bowls are kept apart from their feeding bowls. Provide water in ceramic, glass or metal receptacles, not plastic. Some cats even prefer to drink out of a well-filled human glass. Most cats prefer a wide bowl so their whiskers don't touch the sides, and fill the bowl to the top. Provide several water bowls around the house, this will definitely encourage your cat to drink more –also very important for kidney or bladder conditions. Pet water fountains provide a source of running water, which some cats prefer.

Litter trays

Litter trays should always be kept away from food or water bowls. This is probably the most important of the resources to get right, because failure to do so is more likely to cause lower urinary tract issues AND can result in your cat urinating or even defaecating around the house. There's a lot to say about this, so we recommend you check out this webpage

<https://icatcare.org/advice/choose-litter-tray>

and the following pdf handout about house soiling has great general litter tray advice:

<https://www.catvets.com/public/PDFs/ClientBrochures/HouseSoiling-WebView.pdf>

Sleep/Resting areas

Some cat owners assume their multiple cats like each other because they're always asleep on the same bed. Unless they sleep touching bodies – proof that cats really do like each other – it's more likely that the bed is the only comfy place to rest in the house. Provide a variety of comfy warm beds; if you really want to pamper your cat you can even get heated beds!

3. PROVISION OF THE OPPORTUNITY FOR PLAY AND PREDATORY BEHAVIOUR

Preceding those 10-15 meals a day in the wild would be a period of stalking and chasing, and only about one-third of hunts are successful. With this in mind, we can understand that during their waking hours, short as they may be, cats are rather active. Play should mimic hunting behaviour, with short bursts of activity, stalking and catching 'prey' objects. Wand toys such as 'Da Bird' are ideal for this, but small mouse-sized fluffy toys are also good, and larger ones such as the Kickeroo to really get their killer claws and teeth into. Play time should ideally be at regularly times so your cat gets used to the routine, but should also be instigated by your cat – its no good prodding them to wake up because you can squeeze a quick 5 minute play session in! Cats that get on well, will often establish playtime together, often taking it in turns to hunt or be hunted. For these cats providing boxes or tunnels to hide in is a good idea.

4. PROVISION OF POSITIVE, CONSISTENT AND PREDICTABLE HUMAN-CAT SOCIAL INTERACTION

Cats are creatures of habit and routine. They soon learn your routine like what time to start staring at your face just before you wake up, and when to expect you home for dinner and strokes. In general, they prefer frequent, low intensity contact – a quick head-rub on your leg will suffice to reassert your connection. Each cat is different and some cats are quite needy, requiring a lot more fuss and attention! Unpredictable human contact can be a significant stressor to cats; such as picking them up a lot, waking them up to cuddle and stroke them, for example. Try to respond to your cat's initiation of contact but not overdo it.

5. PROVISION OF AN ENVIRONMENT THAT RESPECTS THE IMPORTANCE OF A CAT'S SENSE OF SMELL

Scent-marking their territory helps reassure cats. They will rub their heads regularly on furniture, objects and often you! Scratching also leaves a scent mark (as well as visible scratches!) Try to avoid cleaning the areas where your cat face-rubs, even when it starts to leave a greasy brown mark. Providing appropriate surfaces to scratch is important. Cats like to extend up at full stretch, so make sure a scratch post is tall enough, and provide some horizontal scratchers too. Using strong smelling cleaning products, room fresheners etc can upset cats' finely tuned noses, any cleaning agents used on cats' trays or bowls should be rinsed thoroughly. Feline pheromones (Feliway) may help with cats under stressful situations but are not a replacement for improving the environment in the other ways described. See also <https://icatcare.org/advice/how-choose-scratching-post>

IF YOUR CAT'S DEMEANOUR EVER CHANGES FROM WHAT'S 'NORMAL', ALWAYS CONSULT A VETERINARIAN FOR FURTHER ADVICE.



Bringing dedicated feline veterinary care to your home

PROVISION OF MULTIPLE & SEPERATED KEY RESOURCES

Key resources are FOOD, WATER, TOILET AREAS, SLEEP/RESTING AREAS, PLAY



Keep food and water bowls separate; cats prefer this and will be drink more!



Provide multiple water sources around the home, cats prefer glass or ceramic over plastic, fill bowls to the top, some cats like to drink from a human glass or a water fountain



See 'Optimising litter trays' for further information. Keep litter trays well away from food, water, beds, cat flaps, doors/windows with large view from outside



Cats like a variety of beds at different locations. Toots enjoys a radiator hammock



Feeding puzzles provide mental stimulation and tick the box for 'predatory behaviour'. Puzzles can be homemade too – see foodpuzzlesforcats.com/homemade-puzzles



PROVISION OF THE OPPORTUNITY FOR PLAY AND PREDATORY BEHAVIOUR

PROVISION OF SAFE PLACES

Cats need to be able to 'get away from it all' when they want to, and know when they are in their 'safe place' they will remain undisturbed



HAPPY MIKEY!

Mikey & Toots are stalking each other using a cardboard box as cover!



Mikey & Toots like to explore vertical space and play on these 'cat steps'



Provide a variety of toys & rotate them to prevent boredom



Da Bird is Toots' favourite toy, really gets the hunting instinct going. Play is best done in short bursts of activity



Here, a floor to ceiling cat tree allows access to a bed on top of a tall cabinet



Toots has access to the top of a high book shelf where she can watch the world go by!

PROVISION OF POSITIVE, CONSISTENT AND PREDICTABLE HUMAN-CAT SOCIAL INTERACTION

Cats are creatures of habit and routine. Keeping the interactions with them consistent helps them understand a routine and reduces anxiety. This can apply to feeding, grooming, playing and general interactions. Constantly picking your cat up is stressful to them. Cats tend to choose frequent but low intensity interaction – a quick head rub and stroke is often enough! Children are more unpredictable so often cause cats more stress!



Toots showing her belly just means she is comfortable and relaxed, it is not an invitation to rub it! Toots instigates more contact than Mikey, differences like this must be respected.

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A cat tree provides many scratch surfaces for cats to scratch and scent