



A-Z GUIDE TO

A HAPPY & HEALTHY INDOOR CAT

SUSTAINABLE PET AU

preface

Hello!

Many moons ago when we adopted our first cat, we made a pact that we would fully contain her indoors.

It was a no-brainer.

It would keep her safe from mishaps and dangers - from being hit by cars, getting injured, attacked by snakes and other animals.

And of course to keep her from harming the wildlife.

We have been tested on our resolve. She escaped a few times. And we were bombarded with strident and incessant meowing that didn't stop until she got her way. Enough to drive anyone bananas.

Then there were issues with her weight, urinary tract, and gums!

Drawing on our experiences as well as lots of research, we created this guide to help new or busy Aussie cat parents navigate the challenges and enjoy the rewards and peace of mind of keeping an indoor cat.

We hope you enjoy this little e-guide and find it helpful!

Ling McDonald



AUDITORY

Auditory enrichment is the use of sound to provide stimuli for your cat. The human voice is a form of auditory enrichment for cats so by all means talk, sing, or even read aloud to your cat. You can also play audiobooks, music and recordings of birdsong to provide auditory enrichment for your cat.

BOXES

Boxes are great sources of hiding places. Cats love them. There is no shortage of cardboard boxes in most homes, thanks to online shopping and deliveries. Place boxes around your home in different locations - your cat may develop a few favourite ones. Want bigger? Tape or glue together a few cardboard boxes to make a mini fort or castle.



COMPANION



A solo cat will usually sleep when the humans are away or busy. Hence a non-human companion like another cat or a socialized dog, can be helpful. Ideally a pair of kittens from the same litter are rehomed together as they are naturally bonded and will keep each other company. Introducing a new kitten/cat to your resident cat requires a bit more care and thought but the time and effort will be well worth it.

Two is company three is a crowd. Some experts don't recommend keeping too many cats as this could be stressful for the cats due to increased competition for resources like litter trays, food, and even their human's attention!



DRINKING

Cats need to drink enough water to prevent dehydration and urinary tract disease. Cats fed a diet of dry food need a lot more water than those on wet food. To encourage kitty to drink, have multiple bowls of clean water around the house, change the water every day and wash out containers every other day to prevent the buildup of germs and debris.

ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT

Environmental enrichment refers to strategies that enable cats to exhibit their natural behaviours as much as possible in the context of their indoor environment.

This is paramount for meeting their welfare needs and to prevent health and behavioural problems. The right kind of environmental enrichment is the key to a happy and healthy indoor cat.



FEEDING



Cats are obligate carnivores; they depend wholly on meat to survive. Which means we need to feed them a meat-based diet, with proteins primarily from animal sources.

There is much controversy and debate over what constitutes the best diet for pet cats. There are pros and cons of feeding processed (dry vs wet) vs raw, and homemade vs commercial. Suffice to say, a diet of only dry food is a recipe for urinary tract disease.

It can be challenging, time and budget wise, to get the nutritional requirements right. So for many of us, this means feeding what Australian vet and blogger Dr Andrew Spanner calls the "*practical compromise diet*" - comprising a low-carb wet food, raw meaty bones e.g. chicken neck or wing, some grass, and dare I add, high quality kibble in limited amounts.



GRASS

Despite being obligate carnivores, many cats enjoy eating grass. It is easy to provide indoor cats with grass. Cat grass is easily grown from seeds. Have two pots of grass growing inside the house – one in active service and the other in recovery after the grass's been munched. Just remember to keep them watered for maximum lushness!

HIDING

Hiding makes a cat feel safe, secure and relaxed in its surroundings. Hiding is normal behaviour that is especially important for shy, timid and anxious cats. And when faced with unfamiliar surroundings like a new home or going to the vet. Provide different boxes and other structures for hiding around the house and kitty won't have to seek out hiding places that are unsafe, such as inside the washing machine, dryer, or heating appliances.



INTERACTIVE

This is the kind of play that involves interaction with you or another cat. For example, fetching, wand catching, hide and seek. Interactive play with another cat includes chasing, wrestling, and play-fighting.

Interactive play is more intense and engaging than self-play with an unmoving object such as a toy. This is particularly so for energetic cats with a high motivation for play. That said, interactive play does not replace self-play. Both forms are necessary in your cat's play repertoire.



JUMPING

Jumping (and climbing) are part of a cat's repertoire of natural behaviours. This enables them to reach places off the ground for security and a better vantage. Make the most of their jumping and climbing abilities by providing structures such as shelves, perches, cat trees and structures with height.

KNEADING

Cats start to knead as kittens while nursing on their mother, which helps to stimulate the flow of milk. Some cats never outgrow it and continue to knead on stuffed toys, blankets, and other soft objects, including the clothing and skin of their humans. This is normal behaviour that signals their contentment and love and affection for their humans.



LITTER BOX/TRAY

Inadequate provisions for kitty's toileting needs can lead to litterbox avoidance and soiling of household furniture. It is recommended to have one litter tray/box per cat, plus one. So, two cats will ideally have three litter trays between them, placed in relatively quiet and undisturbed locations around the home. Keep the litter setup clean by scooping out faeces and urine clumps twice daily and disposing of the entire lot and washing out the tray regularly.

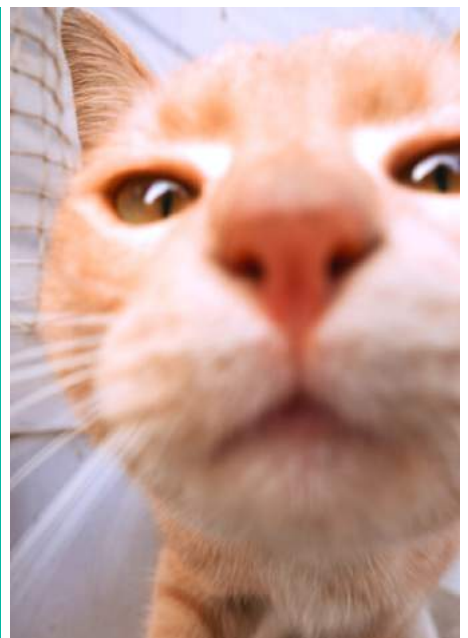


MUSIC

There is music for humans, and there is music for cats – composed using notes, rhythms and sounds designed to appeal to cats. If this intrigues you, search for this online and play some sample snippets when your cat/s need some soothing or energizing. You could get some *pawsitive* reactions!

NOVELTY

Novelty can be a cause of stress to cats, e.g. new member of household, environment, or routine. At the same time, novelty is an important factor for having success with toys. For cats motivated by novelty, be sure to regularly rotate the toys used in play sessions and keep them out of sight when not in use.



OLFACTORY

This refers to the use of scent and smells for kitty's environmental enrichment. Catnip (*nepeta cataria*), in both dried and fresh forms, is often the olfactory stimulant of choice, and can send many cats to heights of ecstasy. However, not all cats respond to catnip and this is normal too. If your cat does not respond to catnip, try growing cat thyme (*teucrium marum*), a hardy and drought-tolerant plant with a pungent scent that is also beneficial for the garden as it attracts bees.

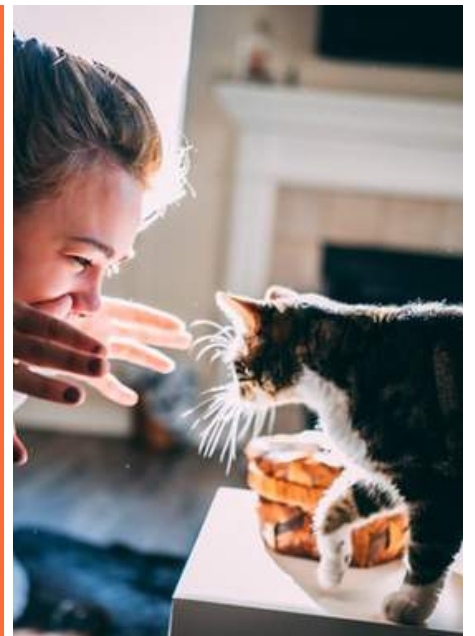


POISONOUS PLANTS

Some common plants, including those popularly used in floral arrangements, are poisonous to cats, e.g. lilies and other bulbs. They cause toxic reactions ranging from localized inflammation to serious illness if kitty eats or nibbles on them. Make sure you know and can identify the plants in your home and surroundings and keep kitty away from them!

QUALITY TIME

Spending quality time with your cat is important. This can be in the form of interactive play, grooming, talking, stroking, and/or cuddling. Quality time together is good for both feline and human well-being. The amount of quality time a cat needs depends on its life stage, breed, and personality. In general, 20 to 30 minutes a day is recommended.



RESTRICTED

Providing restricted or supervised access to outdoors is the way to let your cat enjoy the outdoors without all the risks. One form of restriction is to install an enclosure, aka a catio. You can buy ready-made structures with modular components. Or put together a budget-friendly DIY one. Another way to offer restricted outdoor access is to walk kitty on a harness and leash. There are heaps of inspirational videos and leash training instructions out there so why not give restricted outdoor access a go?



SCRATCHING

A natural behaviour for cats, allowing them to exercise, shed old claw tissue or for marking purposes. This becomes problematic when kitty scratches the carpet or furniture. It is important to provide suitable structures for scratching and to redirect kitty to the right places if it has been scratching inappropriately. Some cats like vertical structures; others may like horizontal so you may need to try different designs till you find the right one. Material wise, it has been shown that the most preferred materials is cardboard or sisal rope.

TOYS

Object-centred play is part of kitty's play repertoire and most cat households have a variety of toys. They provide fun and exercise and need not be expensive. Even a crunched-up piece of paper or a ping pong ball can get kitty quite excited. Generally, the most effective toys are ones that mimic the movement of prey and allow kitty to enact the full prey-hunting sequence of stalking, chasing, pouncing and catching.



URINARY TRACT DISEASE

Full name Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease (FLUTD) - a group of conditions affecting the lower urinary tract which includes the urethra and bladder. It causes much distress for cats and is often the reason for inappropriate urination. Possible causes include calcium deposits i.e. bladder stones and bacterial infections. More commonly, there is no clear or detectable cause – this is termed Feline Idiopathic Cystitis (FIC). Strategies to manage FIC include making changes to diet and environmental enrichment.

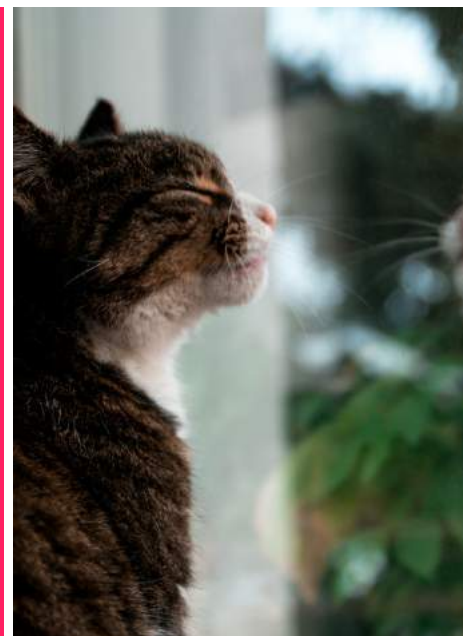


VISUAL ENRICHMENT

Visual enrichment for cats involves giving them opportunities to look at the world around them, from a position of security. This could be in the form of a high cat tree, a perch or ledge on windows so they can look at birds and small forms of wildlife. Good visual material can also be in the form of moving images of prey and these are readily available online on YouTube or the good old TV.

WINDOWS

Windows offer great views for cats but need to be properly secured, i.e. have sturdy insect screens installed, to prevent kitty from getting out, getting lost and/or getting traumatic injuries from falling from a height.



X MARKS THE SPOT

A cat marks its territory by leaving its scent on places (and people), by rubbing, scratching, and urinating. While marking is natural behaviour, it becomes problematic when kitty is marking inappropriately by scratching the furniture or by urinating. In both cases, there are strategies to resolve it.



YOUTUBE

The place to go to for your own cat therapy, as well as offering hours of entertainment for your cat. Need we say more?



ZOOMIES

Bursts of energy that manifest in mad dashes or sprints around the home and can cause a path of destruction. This is normal behaviour so do not be alarmed by your cat getting the zoomies, especially in the middle of the night. Many older cats never outgrow the zoomies. You can even make it interactive by becoming a participant yourself



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