

Kittens are curious creatures that love to explore and learn about the world in a variety of ways. Enrichment provides physical exercise and mental stimulation that allows your kitten to engage in natural behaviors while building confidence and alleviating boredom, anxiety, and frustration. Without regular and appropriate enrichment throughout their lives, felines are prone to behavioural problems such as house soiling, destructive scratching, overgrooming, and aggression. They're also more prone to obesity and stress-induced urinary tract conditions.

Various forms of enrichment that can be applied throughout your kitten's life are outlined below. Not all kittens will enjoy the same type of enrichment, so try a few to find out what works best. Whatever it is, ensure your kitten is supervised and safe at all times and not given toys he or she can destroy and/or swallow.



#### **SOCIAL ENRICHMENT – BUILDING A BOND**

Kittens are quite social and keen to interact and play at every opportunity. Those that are adopted in pairs usually keep each other entertained and out of trouble. Single kittens will find ways to play on their own, but they're also keen to engage with their new littermates (people) in their household. **Social enrichment can include playing, petting, brushing, and training.** As grownups, cats need their independence, but they continue to benefit from

positive, consistent, and predictable interactions with their people. Cats will experience less stress if they're allowed to choose whether or not to interact and should never be forced to do so.

#### **PHYSICAL ENRICHMENT – KEEPING LIFE INTERESTING**

Physical enrichment doesn't just mean exercise. By including different elements in your kitten's environment that allow him or her to engage in natural feline behaviours, you'll keep your kitten both physically active and mentally stimulated.

- **A variety of toys** including those that resemble prey (birds or small furry critters) and encourage chasing and pouncing keep playtime fun and interesting, especially if you rotate through your supply every few weeks making an old toy seem new again. There are plenty of inexpensive and effective DIY ideas on the Internet to keep your kitten entertained.
- **Platforms, perches, or tunnels** add variety and provide opportunities to run, climb, stretch, and explore different surfaces as well as escape for some quiet time.
- **A scratching post** gives kittens an outlet other than your furniture for their normal scratching behaviour. They scratch to mark territory, maintain their nails, and stretch out. Choose a post that's secure (not wobbly), provides a texture your kitten likes (e.g., cardboard or sisal rope), and is long/tall enough for an adult cat to achieve a full stretch (about 4 feet).





## SENSORY ENRICHMENT – EXPLORING YOUR WORLD

Sensory enrichment is all about taking in and engaging with your surroundings. Although most cats are kept indoors for their safety, there are a number of ways you can provide opportunities to interact with the world around them to engage their sense of sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch.

- **Go for a walk outside.** Once your kitten is a little older and appropriately vaccinated, you can try training him or her to go for walks with you. Be sure to use a harness with a leash for better control and safety. Some cats take to this activity quite well. (We know of one that has happily hiked on the Bruce Trail with her owner.)
- **Provide a view to the outdoors.** Open blinds or curtains and provide a perch to allow your kitten to watch and listen to what's going on outside. Consider placing a birdbath or bird feeder within sight of the window for added interest. (Birds will learn to ignore your kitten's presence.)
- **Play music or videos** when you leave your kitten at home. Sights and sounds of nature can bring the outdoors inside. Keep in mind that one study suggests cats prefer music that mimics the frequency and tempo of how they communicate and includes sounds to which they innately respond. Music for Cats aims to do just that. With its infusions of purring, chirping, and suckling sounds, you may find it just as relaxing as the cats that seem to respond well to it.
- **Provide an outdoor catio** (an enclosed patio for cats) if you're willing and able. Catios are the ultimate outdoor living experience for indoor cats as long as they have access to shade, food, water, a litter box and an easy means of returning indoors.



## NUTRITIONAL ENRICHMENT – WORKING FOR FOOD

Working for food engages all of a kitten's senses as well as his or her natural hunting and scavenging instincts. The physical activity also helps prevent obesity, a common problem with indoor cats. Be sure to consider safety (avoid anything that can be torn apart and ingested), level of difficulty (start with something easy to avoid your kitten becoming frustrated), and ability to keep your kitten's attention.

- **Food puzzles and dispensing balls** range in difficulty and provide hidden compartments for kibble or treats to challenge your kitten's problem-solving skills. They also slow down eating and can help a pet feel fuller and more satisfied.
- **Scavenger hunts** for kibble or treats placed in hidden spots around the house are another way to engage foraging activity.
- **Training to perform tricks** in return for kibble or a high-value treat isn't just for dogs. Cats are just as capable of learning tricks, and many will work for a food reward. Search the Internet for "clicker training cats" to learn how to train a cat effectively.

