## **Tips for keeping your cat mentally stimulated so they don’t need to escape outside.**

Cats are intelligent and active creatures whose brains thrive on challenges, so creating mental stimulation is important for your cat’s overall wellbeing and happiness. If a cat doesn’t have challenges provided to them, they’ll begin to make their own entertainment in their surrounding environment like attacking furniture, late night play sessions, or other undesirable behaviors such as bolting out an open door.

## **Interactive Play Is Critical for Indoor Cats**

Playtime is crucial for keeping an indoor cat mentally happy, physically healthy, and content to be inside. Make a habit of playing with your cat for at least 10 minutes a day. Kittens and some rambunctious cats require more than that.

The best type of play for keeping a cat happy is interactive, where you use a toy to mimic the behavior of a cat's prey animals, either birds or rodents. [Wand toys](https://www.purrfectpost.com/wand-toys) are exceptionally good for this. Make the toy on the end of the wand act like scared prey, darting away from your cat, hiding, and freezing in fear. Don't make the game too easy, but do let your cat catch the "prey" sometimes, especially at the end of the game, after which you should reward your cat with a treat or meal. That is, after all, what would happen after a successful hunt in nature

**Good Scratching Posts Are a "Must"**

Cats scratch to exercise, destress, and mark their territory. If they don't have good scratching posts, they can become stressed and exhibit negative behaviors, like urinating and scratching inappropriately. A good scratching post means:

* Sturdy, so there's no chance of it wobbling or falling over when the kitty leans into it.
* Tall, so the cat can fully stretch his body all the way up it for a good back stretch,
* Covered in material that doesn't catch and pull on claws and is satisfying to scratch. Sisal fabric and heavy corrugated cardboard are the best scratching substrates for cats.

## **Let Your Cat Hunt for Food**

Interactive play, when your cat can chase a wand toy that acts like prey as described above, helps cats indulge their hunter instincts. You can further encourage this by breaking your cat's daily food allotment into smaller sections and hiding these around the house every day so your cat must stalk and hunt his food. Not only does this get him a little extra exercise, but it also provides mental stimulation, especially if you're gone for the day. When you first begin to do this, you might need to encourage your kitty to find the food, guiding him along, until he understands what you've done and what he needs to do to get his food every day.

You can also put some of your cat's kibble into a puzzle toy that he can work on throughout the day. This is a lot of fun for a cat and can keep his mind occupied for a while. It also decreases the calories that your cat is getting all at once.

**Get New Toys Routinely**

Cats can and do get bored with the same toys all the time. You can mitigate this by having a box of [toys](https://www.purrfectpost.com/toys/) that you keep out of reach of your cat and bring out a few at a time, rotating them routinely. Also, [wand toys](https://www.purrfectpost.com/wand-toys) should be put away after an interactive play session for a couple of reasons:

* Your cat will view a wand toy lying on the floor as "dead prey" and won't be impressed if it suddenly comes back to life.
* There is some danger associated with leaving wand toys out in case your cat becomes entangled in the string part while you're not there to supervise.

You can sometimes revitalize old toys by spraying them with catnip or honeysuckle spray. This technique can renew your cat's interest in a toy that he's gotten bored with and is ignoring.

Get new toys often, too, to keep your cat interested and engaged in play. You can get catnip or honeysuckle toys, depending on which your cat responds to better, ball toys, and wand toys, to keep as much variety as possible in your cat's daily play routine.

**Maximize the Space You Have**

When your cat stays inside, it's important to maximize the enrichment that he gets out of the space. Provide kitty hiding spots like cat caves (boxes, cat cocoons, etc.) because cats love to hide and watch what's going on with a feeling of being invisible.

Many cats also like to hang out up high, so they can watch what's going on below them without being involved in it if they don't want to be. You can provide tall scratching posts and cat trees, clear off space on high shelves (just be sure they're bolted to the wall for safety) or the refrigerator top, and some people even build elaborate cat walks near the tops of their walls for their cats to enjoy.

**Keep Entertainment Available When You Aren't Home**

Indoor cats can become bored when you aren't home. You can help mitigate that by hiding their food in portions as described above, and you can also get an automatic cat toy with a "play while you are away" function. These toys can be set to turn on randomly and give your cat something to anticipate and enjoy while he's home alone.

You can also provide entertainment to your cat by placing a cat tree with a lounging platform near a window and then mounting a bird feeder outside of that window. Your cat will love to sit and watch the birds while you're gone. Just be sure to put the feeder far enough away from the window that the birds aren't spooked by the kitty.

## **Consider a Catio or Other Enclosed Outdoor Space**

You can buy or build an enclosure called a catio that makes going outside safer for your indoor cat. These can provide wonderful enrichment opportunities for indoor cats. Remember that simply letting your cat out into a fenced-in yard might not be safe because your cat might jump over the fence and it also won't necessarily keep predator animals or other cats that could be a threat to your kitty out of the yard.

**What makes a good catio?**

1. Safety

* Extend the fencing below ground to prevent burrowing.
* Use thick wire to prevent intrusion from other animals or escape.
* Make sure to cover the roof/ceiling to protect from attack or escape from above.

1. Usefulness

* Places to climb
* Perches
* Sun exposure
* Shade

1. Human Utility

* Can you get in easily to scoop the litter?
* Are you able to clean inside?
* Are you able to water the cat grass?

1. Feasibility

* What type of catio are you able to build based on the amount of space/resources you have?

1. Good Cat TV

* Does it have a great, wide view of the yard?

1. Aesthetics

* Does it have a unified design with the rest of the home?

1. Affordability

* Is it within budget?

**Examples of Catios:**

**A collage of a house

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Cat-only catios, tents or enclosures can be small and inexpensive to buy or build, fitting in an otherwise unused space. Or cats and people can share a space created by screening in an existing porch or building a new addition to your home. There are pre-made kits, designs for sale, totally DIY options, or you can hire a contractor. How you provide access for your cat can also vary – a window or door, a wall cut, directly through a tunnel, or you can carry your cat out to a free-standing structure.

If you are interested in learning more about catios, please visit the following website:

<https://catsandbirds.ca/research/cat-enclosures-and-catios/>

From the website of: <https://habitathaven.com/> (in Toronto)

For Healthy, Happy Cats

Many of our customers have said their catio has made their lazy lackadaisical cat more upbeat and alert. That their cats are less inclined to scratch furniture or bolt out an open door.

Whether your cat likes to watch birds from the comfort of a kitty hammock or jump across a network of platforms and bridges, your feline friend will love their new space.

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# Catio Benefits

##### **HAPPY, HEALTHY, AND SAFE PETS**

The term "catio" is defined broadly as "secure outdoor space for the purpose of enriching a cat or cats' lives." So where it is a large sprawling enclosure with tunnels, stairs, perches, and towers or simply a small area out a window, it certainly counts! Habitat Haven has been providing pets and their owners happy and worry-free outdoor enjoyment since 2003. Our trademark catio designs are strong, durable, adaptable, and attractive. Recommended by veterinarians throughout North America, our long-standing reputation endures as the best way to keep pets safe outdoors.

We all want to give our cats the best quality of life possible, and access to the outdoors is crucial for the overall well-being of cats. Experts agree that cats are very similar to dogs in that their lives are enriched by the sights, smells, and textures of the outdoors.

Letting your cat enjoy time outdoors has many benefits but letting cats roam unconstrained is generally considered a dangerous solution. In fact, the experts at the Animal Humane Society in Minnesota estimate that cats who are allowed to roam freely outdoors may have a lifespan that is 10-12 years shorter than the average indoor cat. On average, cats who are allowed to roam outdoors often don’t live to see age five.

A well-built enclosure like those Habitat Haven provides will allow cats to have all the benefits of being outdoors and still remain an “indoor cat.”

The key benefits realized by giving cats outdoor catio space:

**Safety**

There are dangers outdoors such as predators, unfriendly neighbors, busy roads, and more. Providing a safe and controlled outdoor space, such as a catio, can keep your cat contained and protected from many of the dangers they may encounter if allowed to roam freely outdoors.

Habitat Haven enclosures use materials that are purpose-built for use with cats and time-tested to last in outdoor environments. The mesh material openings are just the right size to allow your cat to view and interact with the world around them while also preventing potential threats like wild animals, predatory birds, dogs, and other cats from entering the catio.

**Health**

Many cats that live exclusively indoors find themselves bored and lacking the mental stimulation that can deter unwanted behaviors such as urinating in the house, using the furniture as scratching posts, and fighting with other pets in the home. Access to the outdoors can help alleviate many of these issues as it allows them to express themselves more naturally outside of the home so that they can rest easier indoors.

A catio also keeps your cat out of harm's way of many pests, parasites, and diseases. It gives them the outdoor access they need to reduce stress and express their natural instincts. And it can even provide them with the added benefit of exercise - especially within a catio that includes several shelves, perches, or stairs for them to climb.

While outside, cats are able to use all of their senses and express their instinctual behaviors to stimulate their minds which typically leads to happier cats!

**Other Benefits**

Free roaming cats also pose a threat to the local wildlife. Cats hunt for birds, mice, squirrels, and reptiles while outside, and since they generally stick to a relatively small area, they can have a large impact on the local ecosystem. Catio enclosures can serve a dual purpose of protecting your cat from wild animals while protecting birds and other local wildlife from your cat.

They also keep your cat securely contained so that your neighbors will have no reason to complain about your cat trespassing.

In addition, keeping cats strictly indoors can also pose risks:

* Difficulty expressing normal cat behaviors
* Lack of stimulation leads to boredom Increased incidence of behavior issues
* Lack of exercise causes a higher rate of obesity
* Stress associated issues
* It is overall more difficult to fully meet the physical, social, and emotional needs of strictly indoor cats

Let us help you improve the well-being of your cat(s) while also keeping them safe!

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