

Basic Principles of Happy Cat: Five Pillars of Feline Welfare

Lacie B. Lee DVM



1. Provide Safe Places.

Each cat in the home needs their own safe resting place according to their preference (tree dwellers versus ground dwellers). There needs to be an adequate supply of locations to decrease demand. Providing multiple resting places according to the cats Sun Dial or Cat TV will ensure success. Multiple areas of appropriate safe dwelling will encourage cordial feline time sharing in the home. In their safe places they should not be afraid of an ambush or removed against their will (to be given medications, place in a carrier, etc.) These spaces will also provide scent soaking for the important group scent.

2. Provide multiple and separate key environmental resources: food stations, water stations, toileting areas, scratching areas, play areas, and resting spots.

In doing this, the general rule of thumb is one per cat plus one. These need to be spread out in socially significant areas. Cats do like to be near their people and will establish socially significant scents. Many of these serve as sign posts for appropriate marking of territory. A cat will mark its territory in some way. This is so important to a species that is highly solitary and territorial. Placement is everything and location is so important. Litter boxes need to be in areas where the cat hangs out, not tucked away in a separate bedroom or laundry room. Scratching posts need to be placed where territorial marking is significant. Cats are generally solitary hunters and therefore solitary eaters, so one feeding station is stressful to some cats and they would rather not eat. It is important here to construct a floorplan that is marked from observation of your cat and their preferences. There isn't a complete standard here but one that can be adjusted between you and someone trained in feline behavior to optimize your home for a happy, secure cat. I call this Feline Feng Shui.

3. Provide opportunity for play and predatory behavior.

Cats are natural-born hunters with a high prey drive. They are much more suited to working for their food and this gives them a feeling of satisfaction and satiety. This also prevents obesity and over-eating out of boredom. Cats love to operate in rhythms and rituals. Hunting is one of those rituals. Provide opportunities to perform the "hunt, catch, kill, eat, groom, sleep" ritual. Cats were created with many sensory cells adapted to a hunter's lifestyle. This can be provided for indoor cats by using wands (such as a Cat Dancer®), motion mice, and various other toys. You can also incorporate feeders for cats in this behavior- www.foodpuzzlesforcats.com. These behaviors are excellent exercise and will decrease their tendency for undesirable behaviors. Ask our team for options for your cat!

4. Provide positive, consistent, and predictable human-cat social interaction.

The humans that a cat lives with do become part of their social scent and they do enjoy interactions with their humans. Spend dedicated time each day with each cat. This can occur in the form of play, petting, brushing, clicker training, fetching, etc. Some cats are okay in a group setting for this. Respect the personality of the cat and if they need this in solitude with just their person allow this to happen.

5. Provide an environment that respects the importance of the cat's sense of smell.

No harsh air fresheners or strong smells. Utilize catnip, silver vine, or the like for scent stimulation. Pheromone products work well in the home setting. Ask which ones may be best for your cat or cats and your home.