

Playing with Cats

Cats play in their own special way! Learning how cats like to play can help encourage safe and healthy activity.

Hunt, Catch, Kill, Eat, Groom, Sleep

This sequence represents a cat's basic motor pattern. In the wild, cats engage in this series of activities repeatedly throughout the day. Playing with your cat according to this sequence is a great way to keep your cat happy!



Interactive Play

Cats benefit from playing with you as you animate a variety of toys that they can hunt, catch, and “kill”. Encourage these natural behaviors that help them burn excess energy:

1. Use a wand or feather toy and move it in the ways that prey animals typically move. For example: cause the toy to scurry away, then hold still, then hide, and then reappear.
2. Use the “[boil and simmer](#)” method to tire out your energetic cats in the best way.
3. Always allow your cat to catch the toy and make the “kill” and then follow up the victory with a meal or treats. This helps your cat feel satisfied by play.

Solving Problems for Fun

Cats enjoy problem-solving! Use problem-solving activities to challenge and engage your cat without frustrating them. Get started with these tips:

1. Use food puzzles to encourage your cat's hunting and foraging instincts. Serve meals in [store-bought](#) or DIY food puzzles.
 - a. For DIY options, put their food in cardboard boxes, paper towel rolls, or simply scatter food around the house or yard.
2. [Clicker training](#) and other learning games teach your cat to respond to cues, and help you bond with your cat.
 - a. Teach your cat a new behavior like a high-five, or even teach them agility!

Play with other animals

Playing with other cats or animals that live in the same household can be a healthy way to bond and deplete daily energy. Your cat may enjoy playing with other cats or dogs in the home.

Ensure that play is safe and healthy by:

1. Supervising play time between animals.
2. Encouraging breaks during play, so as to prevent interactions from escalating.
3. Giving each animal in your household their own “safe zone” where they can retreat to when they are done playing.

For more resources, check out <https://sfhumanesociety.org/behavior-library/>