

How to Raise a Happier, Healthier Cat

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

How to finesse your finicky kitty

As a caregiver, you are a major factor in the happiness of your cat. Satisfying her basic physical and emotional needs frees her to exhibit her "normal" personality, which, as you well know, ranges from clinging affection to aloof independence. For the most part, your cat has the same basic needs as you. Here are five areas where you can make a positive difference in the life of your pet.

Security

Survival is the strongest instinct of all animals. Without freedom from the fear of imminent danger no creature can eat or rest. Here are five of the things your cat needs to feel secure:

- **Personal space** - Does your cat have a favorite hiding spot? Does she surprise you by perching on the fireplace mantel? Does she seek out the most private area of the linen closet on the top shelf? Or stretch out on top of the refrigerator? Your cat seeks out these places for security, warmth, and to satisfy her instinctive need to be on top of it all. If such areas are not readily available in your home, or if you don't wish your cat to frequent these places, you can easily provide her with something equally as satisfying. A [window perch](#) provides a comfortable view, indoors and out. Many pieces of the [cat furniture](#) that we offer include a hideaway - the perfect place for a secure nap.
- **A warm, comfortable place to sleep** - It is normal for your cat to sleep as many as 16 hours per day. She also has an innate need for warmth. This makes where she sleeps extremely important. If your cat is like most, she wants a private place, if possible, out of sight. This is why she finds the space under your sofa so attractive. Providing her a soft [bed](#) or nest is essential. To make it perfect, get her a heated bed. Using low-wattage heaters, [heated beds](#) are set to match your cat's normal body temperature, about 102°F. Even on the coldest winter day, your cat will be cozy.
- **Routine** - Changes of any kind in your household can create anxiety; for example, new cats in the area, new people in your household or redecorating. Keep things routine to minimize her stress. Feed her at the same time each day, and keep her litter box and bed in their respective places. If your cat can easily be intimidated, put her in a separate room when people visit, particularly if they have cats of their own.

Good Diet

Poor nutrition can lead to a number of uncomfortable problems for your cat, for example, low energy, poor quality skin and haircoat, increased shedding, and more frequent incidence of disease. To avoid these and other problems, we recommend that you feed her the Drs. Foster & Smith line of healthy [cat foods](#). Formulated to provide optimal health benefits, these foods use real meat as the primary protein source - at the optimal level for the particular life stage - whole fruits and vegetables, and whole grains like brown rice and barley, which have a high degree of usable carbohydrates. They are fortified with additional vitamins and minerals, and use the best natural sources for fatty acids. These healthy cat foods contain taurine, an essential amino acid cats cannot produce on their own.

A Comfortable And Clean Habitat

Most cats are very uncomfortable if they cannot keep their environment clean. Your cat will clean herself and do everything she can to keep things about herself pristine, but she also needs your help:

- **Eliminate odors** - Cat odor can be unpleasant for you and your family, and your cat. It's also a source of embarrassment when company calls. Because a leading cause of odors are germs, odor control and good hygiene are also important to good health. The litter box is the primary source of "that cat smell." Fortunately, there are new litter boxes available to help hide the odor, and these are also a quantum leap forward in pet hygiene. Hooded styles are available to contain waste and spray. The [Jumbo Hi-Back Litter Pan](#) even has an integrated zeolite filter to capture odors. Others feature built-in cleaning mechanisms, both manual and automatic, to make waste removal easier and extend the life of litter. The [Nature's Miracle® Self-Cleaning Litter Boxes](#) cleans itself and deposits the waste in a disposable container. Sensor-activated ionic air cleaner helps eliminate clumping litter and waste smells. Stainless steel litter rake removes for simple, convenient cleaning. Use of an absorbent like [Odor Crystals](#) removes pungent odor from the air surrounding the box. For set in stains and odors, we recommend [Drs. Foster & Smith Urine Power Away for Cats](#), which contains enzymes to penetrate and clean deeper.
- **Bathe your pet** - Cats are fastidious groomers, but occasionally they need help. If your cat is fussy about water, you can use [Bath Wipes](#) to wipe dander and odor away. [Waterless Shampoo](#) can be spritzed on and towed off to remove oil and dirt. If your cat takes to water, a bath will help keep your cat's coat healthy and beautiful.

Mental Stimulation

Your cat is an instinctive huntress. She usually satisfies this need through play, which

also affords her good exercise and helps relieve anxiety and boredom. In short, it just makes her feel good. You can facilitate play by participating with her in activities, and by supplying a range of challenging toys, safe places to roam, and furniture or trees upon which she can climb.

- **Challenging toys** - The [Da Bird Toy](#) is one of our most popular items. Your cat will be enthralled with its light feathers that mimic a real bird as you direct them with a flexible wand. This chase-toy provides exercise and entertainment, but we're not sure who will enjoy it more...you or your cat.
- **Safe places** - Use an enclosure such as the [Octagon Cat Pen](#) or the [Happy Habitat](#) to keep your cat safe from wildlife and wildlife safe from your cat.
- **Furniture** - A [Cat Tree](#) is a perfect place for a puss to perch on, or to lie in wait of another cat - or even the dog! Anything that towers over the rest of the home's inhabitants will do. [Window Perches](#) are especially popular since they allow kitty to survey her inside kingdom as well as all that nature affords.

Affection

Your cat, no matter how aloof she might appear, craves affection from you, other cats, and even other animals. When you stroke her coat, she will likely purr to tell you she is contented. If you have more than one cat, you should foster a positive relationship among them. Cats that get along are less likely to exhibit behavioral problems related to intercat aggression and urine marking. Play with your cats together, and give each one equal attention. Have them eat and sleep together. Encourage them to groom each other by wiping them down with a damp cloth. If you also have a dog, your cat will view him as a rival for attention. She may also chase him about. This is generally not hostile behavior, but is, instead, an attempt to bond.

If you take care of these five basic cat needs, it is very likely she will be happy, and affectionate in return for your sensitive care.