



Mealtime Enrichment for Cats

Sherrie Yuschak, RVT, VTS (Behavior), KPA-CTP

Revised: May 24, 2024

Published: November 25, 2020

Cats retain many behaviors of their wild ancestors. As predators, they have strength, agility, speed, and keen senses to catch prey effectively. Owners can help their feline friends express these natural skills during mealtimes. Food enrichment provides physical and behavioral well-being for the cat and enjoyment for the family.

Use the following tools to feed part of the daily meal or special treats. Many diets, including prescription diets, can be enhanced with wet or dry foods.

Wet food can be smeared since cats lick up their meals

- Put food on a paper plate, and it slides around a smooth floor. The cat keeps moving to “catch” the food.
- Spread food onto a silicone potholder to provide nooks and crannies for extra licking. Place the potholder on the floor or hang it on a wall.
- Commercial feeders can be purchased online or at pet stores that enable canned food feeding.

Dry food can be placed in puzzles that cats bat, push, and move about to get the food to fall out

- Fold toilet paper tubes stuffed with kibble for pushing, swatting, and chewing.
- Stand paper tubes upright and pack them tightly inside a box for paw scooping.
- Cut paw-sized holes and strips atop a shallow box or a clear container for batting and scooping.
- Many commercial puzzles available for small dogs work well for cats. Put lots of kibble in the puzzle to help novice cats be successful.

Hide and seek because cats use the sense of smell to find food

Cat Licking Food Off Silicone Tray



Photo Courtesy of Kitty Fleming

Commerical Cat Feeder



- Filled puzzle feeders can be hidden within a room or house to encourage the cat to find them.
- Use a wand cat toy to play, then direct the cat to the hidden food.
- Scatter kibble on cat trees, shelves, behind plants, and couches. Start with easy hides in a small room and increase the search difficulty as the cat improves.

Interactive games build a better bond

- Wand toys can be used to play and direct the cat during the hide and seek game.
- Clicker training is a great way to feed meals and teach healthcare behaviors.
- Let your cat watch you fill the puzzle and sit with them while they work.
- Quickly slide a piece of kibble across a smooth floor for running and pouncing fun.

Safety Tips

Supervise pet interactions when using these in a multi-pet household.

Observe your cat during food enrichment to be sure they don't get stuck, injured, or become frustrated.

Small meals in feeders prevent gulping and may lessen vomiting.



Photo Courtesy of Paisley Lunchick

Homemade Puzzles



Photo courtesy of Sherrie Yuschak

Food Puzzle



Photo Courtesy of Bec Hamilton

URL: <https://veterinarypartner.vin.com/doc/?id=9956352&pid=192390e2238ee-2619-46ec-be99-356419885709.1769037569>



The content of this site is owned by Veterinary Information Network (VIN®), and its reproduction and distribution may only be done with VIN®'s express permission.

The information contained here is for general purposes only and is not a substitute for advice from your veterinarian. Any reliance you place on such information is strictly at your own risk.

Links to non-VIN websites do not imply a recommendation or endorsement by VIN® of the views or content contained within those sites.