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**Indoor Cat Enrichment**  
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Indoor cats have specific environmental needs that are necessary to be addressed to keep them happy and avoid common behavior problems. A cat who feels both comforted and stimulated by its environment is one that is happy and properly enriched. A good cat environment has safe places to hide, stimulation, engaging toys, and ways to express natural feline instincts.

Cats may seem happy lying around but cats are both predators and explorers so owners should give cat's the chance to hunt and seek. Cats love to climb and scratch so cat trees and creative shelf arrangement allow for cats to safely meet these needs. A window perch allows cats to sit in the sun and nap. Scratching posts offer cats a place to safely exercise their need to scratch. These can include cat towers or just cardboard posts. When one gives cats these things, it enriches their physical environment and overall sense of happiness and security. Cats that do not have climbing enrichment may create their own by jumping on the kitchen tables and counters; it is important to realize that this isn't acting out but rather exercising a natural instinct that needs a healthy outlet.

Another way to add enrichment to your cat's life is to build a catio. This is an outdoor enclosure that will let your cat play outside. Most catios have screened walls and windows and many owners will add non-toxic plants, scratching posts, and toys to them. Catios are a safe way to allow indoor cats time outside in a safe and controlled manner.

A great way to provide an engaging challenge for your cats is to get a puzzle feeder. This will allow cats to be engaged physically and mentally as the puzzle feeder will

stimulate the challenge of hunting and allow the cat to exercise. Food puzzles allow a cat to engage all five senses and provides enrichment, fun, and treats. Indoor cats can feel large amounts of stress if they aren't active enough. Providing solo cats toys they can use on their own, such a tricky treat balls or toy mice will let a cat who is alone all day still get in play. Despite popular belief that cats are solitary creatures, cats enjoy play time with their owners. In fact, it is crucial to their well-being and happiness that they have daily interaction with others. Some cats may enjoy adventurous activities with you: consider taking your cat on a walk or playing outside in the back yard with her.

Most importantly, remember each cat has a unique purrsonality so you may have to try a few toys or scratching posts or hiding places to figure out what your cat needs. If they don't show interest in one type of toy, try another--if they don't like a mouse that squeaks, try one with feathers. A happy cat is a healthy cat and proper enrichment helps keep cats happy.

The American Association of Feline Practitioners and the Indoor Pet Initiative are both great resources on indoor enrichment for felines.

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*The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA) is a professional organization of 380 veterinarians dedicated to compassionate animal care and quality medicine.*