



TONY LA RUSSA'S ANIMAL RESCUE FOUNDATION

CAT PLAY

While pet guardians would never consider withholding food or water from their cats, many may forget to provide adequate exercise and stimulation to Mittens. Yes, Mittens does sleep a lot, but play is an important component of any pet's health and well-being. The release of energy triggered by regular daily interactive play sessions can help alleviate Mitten's stress and prevent any behavior problems.



Stress Reduction

Mittens is subject to a variety of stressors, usually the result of perceived or real invasions of her territory. Seeing a roaming cat out the window that Mittens can't chase away, having houseguests, adding a new resident (human or animal), or a trip to the veterinarian can cause her anxiety.

One response to stress for Mittens may be eliminating outside the litter box. Another response may be redirected aggression – where Mittens takes out her frustration on another cat, the family dog or even guardians. Over time, stress can cause chronic medical problems. Engaging Mittens in regular play sessions can help alleviate her stress and help keep her mentally and physically healthy.

Preventing Behavior Problems

Without appropriate outlets for Mittens' energy, she may attack ankles, play too roughly or interrupt her guardian's sleep with nocturnal adventures. Several interactive play sessions per day, especially one timed shortly before bedtime, can help reduce or eliminate these behaviors.

Structured Play Sessions

Simulating the Play Hunt: Create play sessions to mimic Mittens' natural hunting behavior. Remember, Mittens is a natural born hunter. Choose a fishing pole toy or one that imitates the noise of flapping bird wings is irresistible to most cats. Make the toy soar around the room, engaging Mittens' attention. Or simulate mouse activity by sliding the end of the toy around on the floor in quick, jerky movements. Allow Mittens to pounce and catch the toy, and bat it around, then jerk the toy away for her to chase some more. End the play session by allowing Mittens to capture the toy.

Note: Avoid laser lights for this type of play session as it is important for Mittens to enjoy the satisfaction of catching the toy as she would catch live prey.

After the Play Session: Sessions should be long enough for Mittens to get tired – probably 15-20 minutes, depending on her age and activity level. About five minutes after the end of the session, feed Mittens canned cat food. This mimics what would happen at the end of a real hunt – Mittens would eat her catch. Don't be surprised if Mittens takes a long nap after a play session.

Routine: Schedule several play sessions a day, preferably at times when Mittens is normally active. Try to make these play sessions about the same time every day. This allows Mittens control over her environment, as she can predict and anticipate her interactive play time. A session shortly before bedtime may help prevent a bout of the nighttime crazies.

Other Toys and Activities

- Provide plenty of safe toys for Mittens and rotate them to make them more interesting.
- To allow Mittens to enjoy the outdoors safely, cat fencing can be added to an outdoor existing fence. It will keep Mittens enclosed and other small animals out, or build or buy a small outdoor enclosure.
Note: Mittens should never be left unattended outdoors, even in a secure enclosure.
- Some cats even learn to go outdoors on a harness and leash.
- Provide perches with a view. A window with a view of bird activity or squirrels can provide hours of entertainment to Mittens. Some cats enjoy watching videos made especially for cats or an aquarium also makes for interesting cat television.
- Hide Mittens' food so she has to hunt for it, instead of putting it in a bowl. Also, toys that may be stuffed with food are available at most pet stores.

A Note about Water

Cats that drink more water are less likely to get urinary tract infections. Urinary tract infections are a leading cause of house soiling in cats. Provide Mittens with several bowls of water, and make sure the water is always fresh. Since cats usually like to drink running water, consider a cat water fountain, available in most pet stores. Mounting a few rabbit or rodent water bottles in several locations offers another novel drinking opportunity to encourage Mittens to drink water.