

Fun for your fuzzball:



The basics of kitten enrichment

Turning your home into a feline wonderland keeps your cat's brain and body healthy—just let him climb and hunt like the wild thing he thinks he is.

So you've got a new kitten and you want to do everything right. You love your fuzzball and you know he needs to see a veterinarian and get started on a lifetime of preventive care. But did you know there are things you can do at home to help keep his body and mind in tiptop shape?

Let's start with the basics. Obviously kittens need food, water and shelter. They also need a well-chosen litterbox, and for you to keep it tidy (translation: scoop daily!). But that's not all. Your kitten's brain is your responsibility too!

Provide healthy energy outlets

Your new buddy needs to use his mind and body in catlike ways to stay healthy. He needs to think and move, stretch and climb, pounce and scratch. There are things you can do to make his little corner of the world (which is his whole world) entertaining and fun. These strategies are called "environmental enrichment."

It's like the old adage "An idle mind is the devil's playground." Bored kittens are

not happy and healthy—and neither are you, because they tend to find outlets for their energy that are less desirable to you (and your stuff).

Let your kitten be a cat

Cats like to hunt, climb and nap, so make sure your kitten has multiple ways to do just that. Put items that are safe to climb on in as many rooms as possible. They can be homemade or just regular furniture, but be prepared for your cat to use his claws on them. Make a few windows accessible to pique your kitten's curiosity—many cats are entertained for hours watching traffic, bugs or birds. If you can provide a safe way for the cat to completely cross the room without ever climbing down, he'll thank you. Many cats feel safer when they're up high, and climbing is good for their muscles and bones.

Climbing allows some muscle stretching too. Some people say stretching is like yoga for cats, helping them balance their brains and have a greater sense of well-being, so be sure your kitten has access to

things he can stretch on—things you don't mind being scratched.

Fulfill your kitten's need to hunt

Don't forget that hunting is a part of your cat's genetics. Having food delivered to his bowl is not normal for him. He'll adapt, of course, but there's part of him that longs for the hunt. Keep things interesting for him by hiding kibbles of food up on his climbing spots or in his cat carrier. (This is great for another reason too. Your kitten will associate the carrier with good things from day one, so when you need him to travel, he'll start out happy). There are commercially available feeding systems that require a cat to chase a toy mouse or figure out a puzzle to release the food. Experiment and see what your kitten likes.

Get creative with your ideas about nurturing your cat's mental health and meeting his needs for enrichment. For us cat people, it's thrilling to see a cat being a cat—finding ways to let him do this will make you both more contented and live happily FUR-ever after!