

Play Therapy for Cats

Cats were born to hunt. All cats need playtime as an outlet for their natural predatory instincts. Providing toys and playtime for your cat creates environmental enrichment as well as necessary mental and physical stimulation. Playtime is also a great way to bond with your cat and help create an outlet for stress and excess energy. In some shy or undersocialized cats, play may even be the key to helping a cat come out of their shell.

Toys and playtime can be a great way to work with common behavior issues such as hyperactivity, destructive behavior, and play aggression. If you have a kitten or a cat who treats hands and feet as playthings, you should redirect this playful predatory behavior to toys to ensure they do not develop the bad habit of hunting your “bed toes.” Remember that, to a cat, *play and prey are the same thing!* By regularly engaging your cat in exciting play, you can help them expend excess energy and give them an outlet for hunting behaviors, so they don’t act out in other situations.



Protip #1: *When playing with your cat, it is important to tease them with a toy so they have to work to get it, but it’s equally important that you let them actually catch the toy, so they can experience the satisfaction of capturing their prey, otherwise your cat may become frustrated. If your cat likes to play with laser pointers, make sure the laser pointer chase ends in being able to capture a real toy.*

Types of Toys

Interactive Toys: Anything connected to you will usually keep your cat’s interest for longer periods of time than remote toys, because you are able to move the toy yourself to better mimic a cat’s prey! Examples include: [Cat Dancers](#), [Cat Charmers](#), or anything you put together at home using a stick, string, and toy on the end. One of the best interactive toys on the market for cats is called [Da Bird](#): a fishing pole toy with a unique feather configuration that, when swung through the air, makes the same flutter sound as flapping wings. When trying to tap into a cat’s play/prey drive, you can’t get any better than that!



Remote Toys: This is any toy that can be thrown, played fetch with, or otherwise keep your cat occupied on their own. Examples include traditional toys like sparkle balls, crinkle balls, and furry mice, as well as more advanced options like [cat ball towers](#) or even battery-powered toys like [interactive butterfly teasers](#) and [feather whirls](#) to mimic prey and keep your cat engaged and excited when you’re not around to play with them directly.

Food puzzles: Make your cat work for it! If your cat is particularly food-motivated, food puzzle toys can be a great way to keep your cat engaged and fulfilled. Food puzzle toys can also help keep hungry cats occupied in a positive way and prevent destructive behaviors (for example, knocking things off of the shelf when they want to get your attention!). Some great options are [Interactive feeder balls](#), [treat mazes](#), [lick mats](#), and [interactive treat dispensers](#).



Protip #2: *When in doubt, use catnip! You can use catnip powders or sprays to spice up any toy and get your cat extra excited about playtime.*