

IS YOUR INDOOR CAT BORED?

**By Laura Speirs
Feline Behavior Consultant**

The statistics are sobering. A cat that goes outside, *on average*, will only live 3-5 years, vs. an indoor cat, who will likely live 15-20 years. More and more it is becoming common knowledge that keeping a cat strictly indoors is the best way to insure a long, healthy life. Most no-kill shelters now require it as a stipulation for adoption. The reasons are many and are not only to protect the cat, but also to protect the adopter from nuisances such as having fleas or extra dirt in their house and vet bills for injuries from cat fights. Having the heartbreaking experience of finding their cat dead in the road or missing forever is also eliminated. Since the majority of cats in shelters have come from the street, the transition from that life to a secure, indoor life can sometimes be challenging.

In the outdoors, cats run, jump, hunt, climb and stretch. When a cat does this inside, he is often admonished not to do so and this creates stress and boredom unless it is replaced with other stimulation. This puts the responsibility on the people in the house to create this stimulation through interactive play and providing interesting things for their cat to do when left alone.

If your cat pesters you, tries to get between you and your computer or newspaper, gets underfoot trying to get attention, is destructive in your absence, or lies around uninterested in things, he is probably bored or depressed. This frustration and boredom can even lead to poor health and lapses in litter box compliance.

Setting up your home to help your cat be happy is not that hard. Just putting a bird feeder outside a window, will provide hours of interest and entertainment. Putting a multi-level cat tree near a window is also great for your cat. Then, of course, toys and catnip are essential. Ever notice how many kinds of cat toys there are in the pet stores? It's over whelming; but the truth is that cats are individuals and not every cat will like the same toys. You'll have to discover by trial and error which ones your cat likes. Almost all cats like interactive toys that fly or move such as poles with feathers attached to a string (*Da Bird* and the *Cat Teaser* are adored by most cats), which is along the same line. Balls and mice may not be of interest to your cat because they basically represent "dead prey" to the kitty, but they usually love

to play with you and the toy that moves. Inexpensive options such as an open paper bag, cardboard box or wad of paper can be great fun for a cat. Kittens are usually better at entertaining themselves, but adult cats like to be played with. Just giving your cat your full attention in play twice a day for 5-10 minutes can make a huge difference in their quality of life.

It's important, also, to create a safe environment for your cat by not having poisonous plants, sharp or small objects, string, ribbon, or thread to swallow. A bored cat will get into the darnedest things! You might even think about building some sort of safe outdoor enclosure for your cat. This protects wildlife and your cat while giving him fresh air and stimulation from life outside your home.

Cats that lie around a lot may develop some muscle atrophy. Does your cat seem a little sunken around his haunches? This could be loss of muscle mass from not jumping and climbing. Having your cat jump up for a feather toy or anything else will increase muscle tone, help his heart and joints function properly, and reduce pent-up stress. Rotating toys and activity so it's not too much the same week after week is helpful. Even daily brushing for a few minutes will mean a lot to your cat.

Your play technique needs to approximate the hunt and kill, so it's important to let your cat catch the "prey" throughout the playtime and have it wind down ("dies") at the end just like it would if it were real prey. That way, also, you don't walk away when your cat is at his peak of activity, leaving him frustrated and unsatisfied.

Before you leave for the day, you could also hide treats throughout the house for him to find to give the kitty something to do. Cindy Miller, a local cat behavior expert, recommends using high quality, dry kitten food as treats instead of the expensive treats usually found in stores. It's very economical and will provide much better nutrition. These treats can also be used as incentive for play with a "couch potato" kitty that needs bribing to get up and play (exercise).

Most cats will accept and appreciate a buddy, especially if you're gone for long hours. This does not take the place of required playtime with their person, but can greatly improve quality of life for your cat and for you! If you're the owner of a single cat, consider it! Shelters are full of many wonderful cats that need loving homes. Adopting a shelter cat is a "win" for the cat, a "win" for your kitty's happiness, and also for you!