



Feline *FROLIC* time

Take time to play with your cat

Anyone who lives with a cat knows that one of the rewarding benefits is watching your cat at play. Cats love to play and they are hunters by nature and playing helps hone that instinct. Kittens can amuse themselves for hours with things they find around the house. But middle-aged and even older cats can benefit with play-time. It's also fun to watch your older cat take on kittenish qualities while in the throws of play.

WHY PLAY?

Play-time with cats can be a fun and rewarding experience for both human and feline. There's a belief that it increases the feline/human bond, considered important to dedicated cat lovers. We all have busy lives but even 15 minutes a day can greatly benefit your cat. Playtime can even

be accomplished while you watch a favourite TV show—make use of commercial time to play and interact with your cat.

HEALTH BENEFITS

Cat play has many health benefits for your kitty. Gentle play keeps joints and muscles working and is especially beneficial to cats that are prone to being couch potatoes. Active play can help overweight cats shed some flab while gaining cardiovascular fitness. Making use of a dangly toy up high on a scratching post will mean that your cat gets some stretching and lengthening exercise—the equivalent to kitty yoga.

Games also provide mental stimulation and activate your cats natural prey instincts. Play can also alleviate any negative energy or aggression you cat may have.

WHAT TO PLAY WITH

Keep toys tidy by placing into a toy box and rotate toys so that your cat doesn't become bored. Your cat's toy box can contain a variety of store bought treats but should also accommodate some cheap household items. Some great toys to buy: wand or fishing type toys; balls with bells in them; crinkly toys; toys with catnip in them (if your cat is a catnip fiend) and the classic rabbit fur-covered mice.

Other toys that you can create from household items would include toilet rolls, drinking straws and wads of balled up paper. A simple balled up piece of paper becomes a fantasy prey animal and socks are equally fun to pounce on and bat around the floor. Empty tissue boxes also make inexpensive toys by placing a ball or two inside.

Cats love tunnels and have lots more fun if they're made of soft material and/or have a crinkly sound. The cheaper options are lightweight and can be folded up, concertina style for easy storage. These make excellent bunkers for commando attacks on passing ankles and feet. A wand toy dangling at the end of a tunnel can be an amusing game for you both.

APPROPRIATE PLAY

There some rules when engaging in cat play and these are commonsense. Always supervise young children and cat/kitten play together. Children often don't realise that rough play can harm a small kitten or even a fully-grown cat. Cat play should never involve a child picking up a cat—make sure all play is on the floor.



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Photo by Animax

“Cats love to play and they are hunters by nature and playing helps hone that instinct.”

TOP TIPS FOR THE **Toys** YOU CAN MAKE

✦ **Chinese noodle boxes:** these cute boxes just need the wire handle taken off them and then punch little holes in them. Fill these with treats that are just small enough to tumble out of the holes.

✦ **Crinkly shopping bags:** some fashion companies like Jay Jay's have sturdy plastic shopping bags. Snip the handles off the bag so that your cat can't get these stuck around her neck. Cut open the bottom of the bag so that your cat can use this as a crinkly tunnel.

✦ **Baby toys:** purchased new or from op shops, these can make great toys for cats as well. Try a wrist rattle to keep her amused or a play mat with dangly objects.

✦ **Pom Poms:** make your own if you have the time, patience and plenty of yarn or wool, otherwise you can cheat and buy packets of them. They come in a variety of sizes and colours. Stick a couple of small ones with paste, glue onto ping pong balls for added fun.

✦ **Ping Pong balls:** these basic cheapo ping pong balls make for great stand alone toys. Cats love to bat these around a room but they can get easily lodged under couches and other household furniture. So a great suggestion is to let your cat play with them in a shower recess or empty bath. The balls will ping off the hard surfaces and make a surprising noise.

✦ **Catnip sock:** buy some high quality catnip and snip open a small hole in the bag. Place into the toe of a clean, used sock and tie off the sock at the top of the bag. You make a tie out of ribbon or household string. If using string, make sure you ship off the ends close to the knot.

✦ **Pipe cleaners:** really big craft ones are super soft and are very flexible. They can be bent into all sorts of crafty shapes or you can make wild looking bug-like creatures out of them.

✦ **Foil balls:** also found in craft stores, these spikey, colourful balls are lightweight and make a wonderful sound.

✦ **Feathers:** packets of dyed large feathers from large birds like chooks and ducks can deliver hours of fun. Dangle them from a string, loop them together, thread them through a pipe cleaner bug or just let your cat bat them around the house. Long Peacock feathers also are a favourite for keen kitties.

✦ **Tissue box:** this is a great toy for the problem solvers in your family. Get a small (empty) tissue box—the type that has the plastic slit at the opening. Fill with tasty treats like Greenies, Seaflex, or your cat's favourite dry crunchie food. It'll test your cat's mental abilities to try to get the treats out of the box.

✦ **Doorknob toys:** doorknobs are a great place to hang dangly toys. Buy a fur covered mouse from your local pet store and tie its tail to a length of ribbon. Wrap the other end of the ribbon around the doorknob and engage kitty in play.



Explain to little children that when kitty comes to them it's special. Your kitten is then interested in gentle interaction. Children grasp this concept quickly and will understand the special significance of a kitten seeking their company.

Kittens will engage in play with anything but make sure dangerous items are not left around the house for them to seek out. These include shoelaces, string, plastics bags and anything small that could be ingested. Teach children, early on, that hands are not toys. A playful kitten may seem harmless but once her claws and adult teeth start working on your hands and digits, it can become more painful than fun.



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Early diagnosis of feline arthritis is important in helping minimise the pain and further damage to the affected joint(s).

Symptoms of arthritis in cats include:

- Overt lameness
- Reduction in the ability to jump
- Poor grooming habits
- Abnormal elimination habits
- Anorexia
- Depression
- Weight loss
- Aggressive behaviour



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Reference: 1. Lascelles B.D.X. et al, J Vet Intern Med 2007;21:410-416.

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