# Keeping Your Cat Busy and Happy

While we all love considering our cats as 'part of the family', it is important to acknowledge the difference between species and how we like to interact and behave.

While cats are often considered couch potatoes it is important that they are provided safe activities to keep them entertained and to encourage their display of natural behaviour. We do this by providing "Environmental enrichment".

Environmental enrichment is providing safe and appropriate resources for your pet to display natural behaviours in a controlled situation.

Natural behaviours for cats can include hunting, scratching and climbing. While we don't want them hunting our favourite shoe or climbing the curtains or scratching the furniture, we can provide them with appropriate items to display this behaviour and enrich their lives.

## Scratching:

This is a normal behaviour for cats. They use it to communicate territory, to help them stretch and as a way of self -grooming their nails.  Cats can have preferences about the surfaces that they enjoy scratching. Some will like to pick surfaces below them (e.g. when they pick at the carpet!) and other like to pick surfaces they can reach up to (e.g. when they pick the couch!). Examples can include:

- Scratching poles
- Scratching mats (carpet surface)
- Scratching pads/ wedges

They should always be stable and tip resistant as cats can have some power behind them when scratching these types of surfaces and tipping objects can cause fright.

## Climbing:

Cats naturally love to climb and perch up high (relating back to their natural hunting instincts). Providing your cat with different levelled surfaces and places to hide, provide not only physical activity and exercise, but also enrichment and 'safety' in height (in their eyes- think Lion king on the rock). Climbing surfaces can  be purchased or homemade, but should always be stable  and secured so they do not tip over or fall down. Examples can include:

- Cat trees
- Cat towers
- Cardboard boxes of varying heights
- Cat playhouse

- Wall shelving- (when attached appropriately and safely)
- Cat igloos

## Hunting:

Cats are natural hunters. When contained as pets , they can be limited in displaying this natural behaviour. There are a couple of ways we can use this natural behaviour as a form of enrichment for our cats. These can include:

- Scatter feeding:
  - Great way to start encouraging cat to look for food. Take their meal and toss it across the floor, rather than feeding in your cats bowl.
- Treasure hunting:
  - Take your cats meal (dry food) and place each piece of kibble around the house, yard (wherever your cat lives during the day), so they have to 'hunt' for their meal.
  - Start simple and make it progressively more difficult as they pick up the game.
  - Great form of physical activity, mentally challenging and encourages this important natural instinct.
- Feeding toys:
  - Toys such as 'Kongs' or even soft drink bottles with holes cut in them
  - Place kibble in toy or bottle and let cat bat it around to get food out
  - Great because encourages feeding, mental stimulation and physical activity- meaning they are less likely to gain excess weight.

Providing these activities for your cat while they are home alone is a great way to keep them entertained and happy throughout the day when they are left alone for long periods of time and can help in curbing unwanted behaviour and boredom.

## Interaction with family:

And remember, your pets love nothing more than socialisation and play time with you, their family. Playtime with your cat is vital not only in their socialisation habits but also for creating mental stimulation and is important in their physical health and maintaining a healthy weight (especially for indoor cats). Ten minutes a couple of times a day using fishing pole-type toys- which are great for encouraging their natural chase and pounce  (hunting) behaviours or throwing toys for them to chase  is a great way to socially, physically and mentally interact with our cats.