



How to Play with Your Cat

Kittens

Kittens will play with anything. Just keep dangerous items like string, plastic bags, small ingestibles, and just about everything else away from the insatiable Mr. Kitten if you're not supervising him.

Many kitten owners will tell you that the only thing known to mankind that can keep up with a kitten is...another kitten.

Why We Play

- ✔ **Interactive playing** (you playing with your cat) lets your cat hone his hunting skills: seeking the enemy target, making the stealthy approach, pouncing with conviction, relishing the victory.
- ✔ Exercise from playing helps your cat maintain a healthy weight.
- ✔ Playing is a positive way for your cat to release negative energy or aggression.
- ✔ Interactive playing strengthens the bond between your cat and you.
- ✔ Playing helps a shy cat gain confidence.
- ✔ A hearty play session is a good way to ease your cat's transition to a new home.
- ✔ It's fun.

How to Play

- ✔ **Keep a rotating array of toys on hand.** Some good cat toys you can buy: wand toys, balls with bells in them, catnip mice, and crinkly catnip things. Some great toys you already have at home: wads of paper, straws, and plastic rings from milk or juice containers. Put the toys away after playtime. If a toy is always out, it can become boring and unrealistic to kitty, like a mouse that never goes away.
- ✔ **Make the toy act like a mouse or a bird to pique your cat's curiosity.** Pretend that the toy is a frightened little critter. It runs away from the fierce kitty; it hides around the corner, it ducks under the rug, it freezes. Don't overdo it; subtle moves are quite effective. Vary the speed and direction of the toy. Bonus: set out boxes and tunnels that both cat and "mouse" can strategically use for cover.
- ✔ **Let Kitty set the pace.** You can't force a cat into playing, but you can try different approaches to see what generates interest. If nothing else, your creative attempts will amuse him. You might try dimming the lights, since cats like to hunt when it's darker. Match the action intensity to your cat's interest. After a while, you'll get to know his playing style and his look that says "I'm ready to play!"
- ✔ **Let him win.** Don't make it too easy; let your cat enjoy the pursuit. But when he comes in for the Big Pounce, let him score a direct hit and savor the thrill of victory.
- ✔ **Play to strengthen a relationship or ease stress.** Your cat will enjoy regular play sessions with you – you make his toys come to life. In a multiple cat household, an invigorating play session with the humans can help the cats get along.
- ✔ **Afterwards, lots of praise and treats all around.** Good times to quit the play session are a) after you've gone for 10-15 minutes and your cat has just scored a decisive victory; b) you've tried for a few minutes to engage your cat in a play session, but he's just not into it right now. In both scenarios, give your cat some nice praise just for showing up. In the latter case, make the victory a little sweeter with a nice treat. Tell him what a good hunter he is.

Your Assignment

Two play sessions a day, 15 minutes a piece. Extra credit: additional play sessions.

*This information has been reviewed and approved by **The Animal Welfare League of Alexandria.***

To view the complete collection of "how-to" cat articles online, go to www.cats.about.com/howto.htm

© 2001 by Franny Syufy, licensed to About.com, Inc. Used by permission of About.com, Inc., <http://www.About.com>.
All rights reserved.