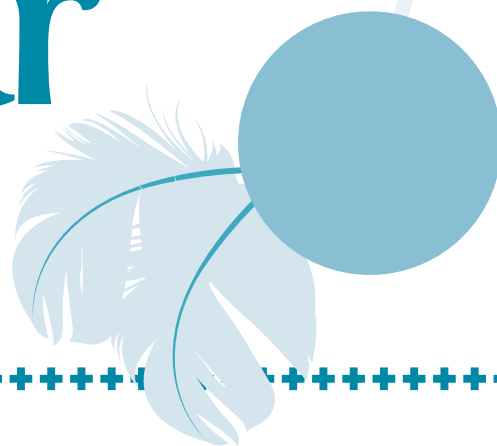


Behaviour matters



Nicky Trevorrow BSc (Hons), PG Dip (CABC), RVN

Nicky works in Cats Protection's Veterinary Department at the National Cat Centre as a Behaviour Manager. Nicky holds a BSc (Hons) degree in Animal Behaviour from Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge. More recently, Nicky completed a postgraduate diploma in Companion Animal Behaviour Counselling from the University of Southampton. Nicky is a registered veterinary nurse. She is a member of the International Cat Care's Behavioural Advisory Panel and represents Cats Protection on the Animal Behaviour and Training Council.

*Playing with their food – **Nicky Trevorrow** looks into creative ways to feed cats*



Photo: CP Library/Chelmsford AC

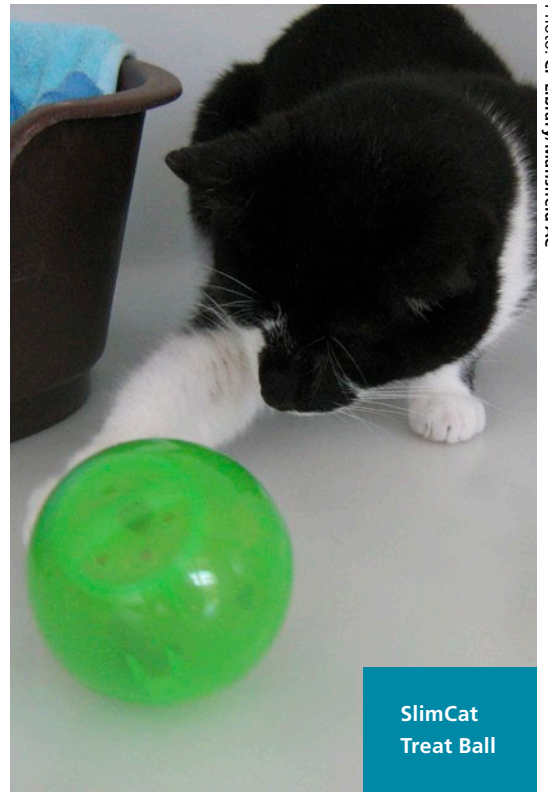


Photo: CP Library/Manfield AC

SlimCat
Treat Ball

For many cats, mealtimes often involve eating from a bowl twice a day. While this is quite convenient, it does not take a cat particularly long to eat their food. Compared to their wild counterparts who spend much of the day hunting for prey, this is quite a different picture. With all the excess free time on their paws and without the thrill of the chase, they could suffer from boredom. So how can we make mealtimes more stimulating and fun?

The first step is to think outside the bowl! Providing food in more interactive ways is often referred to as 'feeding enrichment'. Whether it's providing a homemade enrichment toy or a commercially available one, it is all about making use of the cat's fabulous senses and getting them to work that grey matter.

With any kind of feeding enrichment, starting off simply is the key. Cardboard egg boxes containing a portion of the cat's daily allowance of dry food are a great introduction. Once your cat gets the hang of it, then the complexity can be built up gradually, such as hiding the biscuits within scrunched paper inside the egg box.

In order to prevent your cat from becoming frustrated from not being able to complete the puzzle, try to 'show' the cat how to use the enrichment toy. For example, by 'pawing' at the dry biscuits in a toilet roll pyramid. Just a word of caution though, don't be tempted to bat a puzzle ball around on the floor for two hours thinking that the cat just doesn't understand. If they follow you merrily eating the biscuits as they fall out of the holes in the puzzle ball, the chances are they have cottoned on to it but are

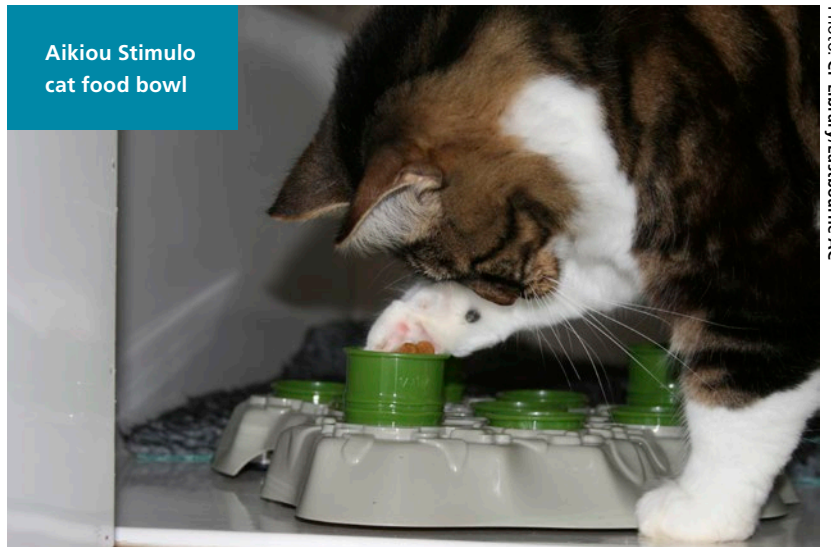
Aikiou Stimulo
cat food bowl

Photo: CP Library/Eastbourne AC

quite happy for you to do the hard work! Instead try showing the cat every few minutes, little and often, until they get the hang of it.

Ensure that all materials used to create homemade items are safe for your cat. If your cat has a penchant for chewing cardboard, then perhaps a commercially available toy may be more appropriate. Many feeding enrichment toys are intended to be used with dry food. However one with plastic cups, such as clean yogurt pots secured in holes in a box, can be used for wet food. Commercially available items are often easy to clean, while the homemade ones can be disposed of when they are worse for wear. Remember to place feeding enrichment away from water bowls as cats prefer to eat and drink in different locations.

Feeding enrichment is perfect for any cat, but especially those that are indoor only. It is so rewarding to see just how clever your cat is and how much enjoyment they gain from the various puzzles. Once you start thinking of ideas for feeding enrichment toys, the possibilities are endless. Why not check out the Cats Protection blog meowblog.cats.org.uk and YouTube channel www.youtube.com/catsprotectionuk for more inspiration? ●