

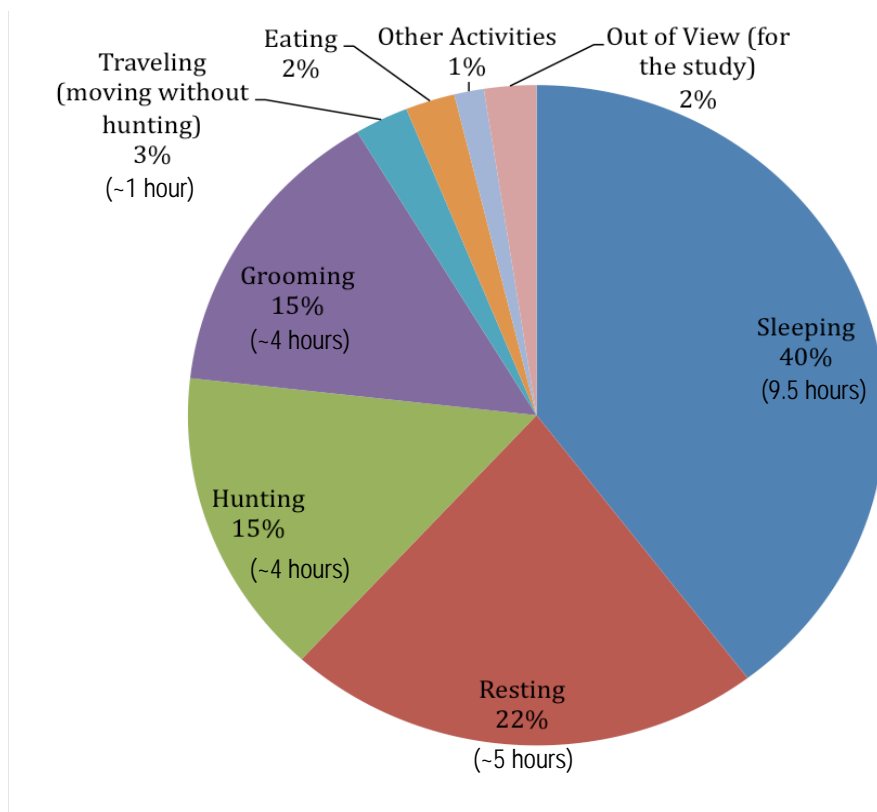


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FELINE ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT

Environmental enrichment is a new area of interest to many animal behaviorists. By trying to mimic cats' natural behaviors in our home environments, we can help them live healthier, happier lives.

How would your cat spend his or her day in the wild?



Sleeping/Resting (62%, ~15 hours/day):

This comes as no surprise to those of us with cats!! Cats often feel most vulnerable while they are sleeping so it is important that they have several areas that they feel safe and secure. Owners should have various places in out of the way locations for rest/sleep within their house, including cat beds (or even simple blankets/towels), perches, boxes, rugs, chairs, cat hammocks and "condos". Putting these structures near windows so your cat can watch the world go by is a great option. It is also important to try not to disturb cats while they are resting.

Grooming (15%, almost 4 hours/day):

This is as much about social interaction as it is about keeping clean. Indoor cats often rely on companion cats or on cat owners to fulfill this need. Cats tend to groom each other on the head and neck, so we should be concentrating on those areas. Always be careful, however, as some cats are intolerant of petting.

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Hunting (15%, almost 4 hours/day):

Since we usually provide all of our cats' food to them in a tidy dish, they have few opportunities to hunt. Cat food can be placed in puzzle toys or in hidden bowls around the house. The "Deli-Dome" Feeding System is a great product for this purpose. The more your cat needs to move to get to his/her food, the better - This helps both with exercise and with the internal desire to hunt. Different sizes and shapes of food and water bowls can make the hunting activity more interesting, and many cats like to eat and drink in varied locations.

Add cat-safe grasses and plants to your home for your cat to eat.

You can also provide your cat different things to chew on like small rawhides, bully sticks, dried fish, and beef jerky. You may have to soak these in a bit of water, chicken broth or clam juice to encourage your cat to chew on them.

Traveling (3%, just under 1 hour/day):

Providing lots of climbing opportunities can help with this need, including stairs, ramps and structures with perching places.

Play:

In our domesticated cats, playful activity can fill the roles that both hunting and traveling fulfill in the wild. When choosing toys, remember that your cat has an inherent need for auditory and olfactory stimulation. Many toy options mimic natural behaviors, and most cats like toys that do something – like squeak, chirp, jitter, swing or vibrate. "Panic Mouse" interactive cat toys (www.panicmouseinc.com) mimic hunting behavior. A laser pointer is a great trick, but be careful to never aim the beam directly at your cat! One favorite for auditory stimulation is a ping pong ball in the bathtub. Olfactory stimulation can be achieved with catnip – Not all cats like the same type of catnip, so try different types/smells, and remember that it loses its smell over time. Try putting away special toys when your cat is not playing with them so that s/he maintains interest in them.

"Trick training" allows your cat to use mental energy. For more information, see "Clicker Training for Cats" (www.clickertraining.com), along with Doris Dingle's "Crafty Cat Activity Book" and "Show Biz Tricks for Cats" (both available on Amazon.com.)

You can also consider cat videos such as "Video Catnip" for your cat to watch while you are away.

Scratching:

Scratching is a normal and important function for cats. The main things to remember for managing scratching behavior are:

1. Make the area that you want your cat to scratch desirable. Sprinkle the substrate with catnip and put it in a favorite location of your cat.
2. Make the unacceptable area undesirable to your cat. Sticky Paws (www.stickypaws.com) is a double-sided tape that is easy to apply and remove. It can be used anywhere you don't want your cat to go as well (countertops, furniture, etc.). Aluminum foil is another good trick.
3. Check out Pavlov's Cat (www.goodpetstuff.com) – an interactive treat and food dispenser for cats. When a cat scratches the post, the device rotates and the food is dispensed.

Other useful resources:

The Ohio State School of Veterinary Medicine provides a great resource for indoor cats, with lots of information on environmental enrichment: www.vet.ohio-state.edu/indoorcat.htm

"The Cat's House" and "Cats Into Everything", both by Bob Walker, available on Amazon.com

References:

"Environmental Enrichment of Indoor Cats"; Terry Marie Curtis, DVM, MS, DACVB Compendium, February 2007

"Environmental Enrichment for Cats" Behavior Clinic, University of Pennsylvania.

