



FEEDING CATS AND DOGS FOR BEHAVIOURAL ENRICHMENT

Choosing the right pet food for your cat and dog is an important element of pet care. However, not only what you feed but how you feed can have a significant impact on their well-being.

Providing behavioural enrichment for your pet is essential, this simply means making their living space interesting and stimulating to prevent boredom and stress. This can be done through play and exercise activities, for instance a fishing rod toy for a cat can encourage natural hunting behaviour; however, behavioural enrichment can also be introduced at feeding times. Food dispensing toys are great for relieving boredom. Working for a food reward (or any positive reward) and achieving encourages satisfaction and a positive mind state.

HOW TO INTRODUCE BEHAVIOURAL ENRICHMENT AT FEEDING TIMES

- 1 There are a range of different puzzle feeders designed for cats and dogs. If you feed wet food, you can also set up puzzle feeders. For instance, a muffin tin can be used with drops put in each compartment, or for cats, place the wet food in a mug on its side so the cat can use a paw to reach for it.
- 2 Hide two or three food dispensing toys for your pet to find. Initially, the toys can be in easy to find locations and later, when your pet is good at finding them, you can make them harder to find.
- 3 Introduce this step by step. It can be done with a few treats or an entire meal but remember to weigh out your pet's daily food portion and take from this, so you don't overfeed.
- 4 Vary what you do. If you do the same thing every day that too can quickly become boring.
- 5 Think about what you provide if you're leaving your pet alone. Dogs shouldn't be left unsupervised with a toy or chew. For more advice on Chew & Treat Safety, please see our latest factsheet.

THE BENEFITS OF FEEDING FOR BEHAVIOURAL ENRICHMENT:

- Slows down speedy eaters prolonging the feeding time.
- Creates a sense of achievement when the food is found/released.
- Encourages natural hunting/foraging behaviour.
- Useful for training. Feeding enrichment is an excellent way to keep a pet occupied with something positive for a short period of time. This can be very useful for crate/carrier training.
- May help preventing obesity as they will burn more calories.



USEFUL LINKS

Dogs: woodgreen.org.uk/pet-advice/dog-enrichment

Cats: www.cats.org.uk/feeding#how+to+make+cat+feeding+toys

Rabbits: www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/rabbits/behaviour/enrichment/dietary

UK Pet Food Factsheets: www.ukpetfood.org/information-centre/all-uk-pet-food-resources.html