

Optimising the environment to reduce feline anxiety



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Introduction:

The cause of stress/anxiety may be related to an inappropriate environment. Similarly, optimising the cats' environment can enable the cat to cope with stressors that it encounters in daily life by increasing security, predictability and control. Without an appropriate environment, cats are unable to practice their natural instinctive behaviours which then causes anxiety and this will often result in the development of unwanted problem behaviours such as scent marking and urination around the house.

Territory is a vital resource for cats that can be divided into:

- The home range (area over which cat will explore and share with other cats),
- Territory (area that cats will defend and demarcate)
- Core territory



Core territory

- The core territory is where the cat expects to be able to access all of the resources that it requires (food, water, resting places).
- The core territory is not demarcated because it is situated within the defended territory.
- In some cases of problem behaviours related to anxiety, it is clear that the cats' core territory (the house) has been breached in some way e.g. by an intruding cat.
- In these cases the cat may reduce its' core territory to one area of the house and begin to defend the breached boundaries (e.g. with scent marking behaviour).



The following resources should be provided within the cats' core territory. It is important when optimising the environment that existing resources are not moved (unless obviously inappropriate), but that additional resources are added instead:

Hiding places and sleeping areas

- Ensure a variation of height and take into account individual preference.

Litter tray

- These should be situated in quiet and private locations
- Away from busy walk ways
- Ensure one tray for each group of cats within a household and one extra
- Look at individual preferences and be aware that these could change over time (e.g. in old age)
- Trays should be cleaned regularly



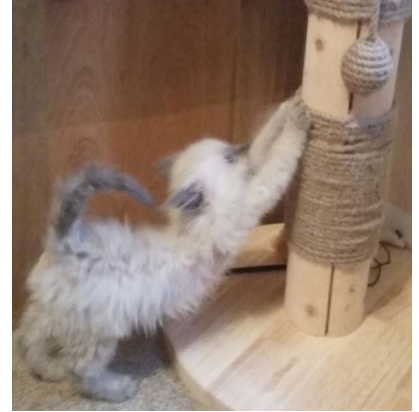
Food and water

- There should be a number of different feeding/drinking stations that give the cat choice and take into account individual preferences.
- The cat should have the opportunity to work for food using treat puzzles/games/novel objects.
- Water sources should be kept approximately a room's distance from food sources.



Scratching

- Provide horizontal and vertical scratching substrates and ensure that there is enough room is able to stretch out adequately.



Access

- Ideally cats should have more than one access point to their core territory.
- If this is not possible, then all measures should be taken to ensure that the single access point is as safe and secure as possible e.g. the cat is given an additional vantage point or safe route of passage (away from other cats) from the house to the garden.
- Microchip cat flaps can be installed which can reduce the chance of intruder cats coming into the home.

Play

- This should allow cats to express their innate predatory behaviour and should involve a number of different toys depending on the cats' preference.
- Owners should rotate toys as cats can quickly habituate to them.
- Owners should engage the cat in play for a few minutes several times a day.

