

# HOW TO CHOOSE TOYS & TREATS FOR YOUR CAT OR KITTEN



Most people who have pets enjoy playing with them and giving them toys. You can enrich your kitten's life with playtime, activities and puzzle feeding. Your cat's natural drives to stalk, scratch, hunt, climb and perch need to be satisfied if he or she is to have a happy life in your home.

Unfortunately, unlike with children's toys, **there are no regulations to ensure that toys made for dogs and cats are safe.** Many that are available in pet stores and supermarkets are unsafe. Many of the treats on the market are also unhealthy.



Check any toy you purchase for parts or pieces that could come off and be inhaled or swallowed. Googly eyes, little bells, small pieces of glued on felt, feathers and strings are some things to watch out for. Never purchase any toy that looks like it could come apart. Laser pointers and crumpled wads of paper are far safer than many toys you can buy commercially.

Whatever toys you choose, it's a good idea to rotate them. Putting a toy away and getting out a different one every few days can help avoid having the cat or kitten get bored with the same old thing. Keeping a cat occupied with a different toy each week may also prevent him from finding excitement knocking over waste baskets or scratching the furniture.

The most popular cat toy is probably the little plastic ball with a bell inside. Unfortunately, most of these plastic toys come from China, which means they are generally suspect as far as safety goes. The plastic is not BPA-free and may contain heavy metals. The bells inside almost certainly contain toxic metals such as zinc or lead. Cats don't gnaw on their toys like dogs do but we still worry about long term exposure to toxins. (The same is true for plastic food bowls. Glass, ceramic or stainless steel are safer.) It's particularly dangerous if your kitten swallows the bell. Use these toys with caution!



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A very popular toy in recent years is the glitter ball, a soft ball with gold or silver "hair". The 2 inch larger size is pretty safe, but we have twice had to surgically remove 1 inch diameter glitter balls from cats' stomachs. They are small enough to be swallowed or choked on. Be extra careful if you have a dog as well as a cat. Toys large enough that a cat can't choke on it or swallow it may be unsafe for a dog that gets a hold of it instead.

Interactive play involves acceptable chase and attack behavior.

- Play with your kitten using a toy he can attack or chase. Good interactive toys are Cat Dancers, Cat Charmers, Da Birds, and other string or wire toys. These are wonderful toys as long as they are put away as soon as you are done playing with them since cats love to eat string-like material.
- Other interactive options are throwing balls, wads of paper, other toys or treats for your kitten to chase.
- Cats generally like regular routines with interactive play. Try to play with your cat 2-3 times daily for 10 – 20 minutes at approximately the same time each day.
- Never allow your kitten to play with your hands or feet. If your cat attacks your feet when you go up and down the stairs, carry an appropriate toy with you so that the cat can attack the toy instead of you. If problems persist, avoid all interactions with your cat for a few minutes to allow more calm behavior. Then start interactive play and praise him for playing with the toy.
- Cats can also be trained to do tricks or commands, and even run agility courses like dogs!

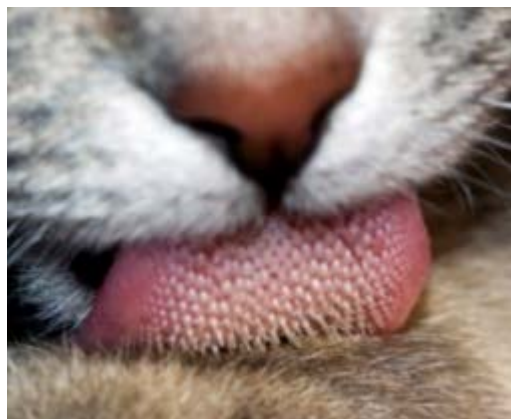


Independent play allows your cat to play by his or herself.

- Leave out toys for the cat to learn to play by his or herself. Good independent toys are tunnels, boxes, paper bags, food puzzles, and cat trees.

Cat tongues are unique! Cats have small barbs on their tongues. The barbs point backwards. The function of these, aside from making the cat's tongue feel like sandpaper when he licks you, is to make grooming more effective.

These little barbs also make it very difficult for a cat to remove string or fabric from its mouth. If a cat is playing with, or chewing on, one of these materials, and it gets too far back in the mouth, it will catch on these little barbs. The cat is not able to pull it back out again, and will reflexively start to swallow the string. Little by little he will be forced to swallow the whole thing.



The cat may choke on the string, or it may lodge in the intestinal tract and need to be surgically removed. In the worst cases, the string or thread becomes caught in the mouth, either by wrapping around the base of the tongue or a tooth, or because there is a needle on the end of the thread that punctures the mouth or throat and lodges there. With one end of the string caught, when the intestines try to move the string along, it saws through the intestine. This causes multiple holes in the intestine, which need to be sutured, and leads to massive infection in the abdominal cavity (peritonitis). Without emergency surgery, the cat will soon die.

#### Things kittens can swallow or choke on

- String, elastic yarn, ribbon or dental floss
- Paper clips
- Rubber bands
- Feather toys
- Plastic bags
- Toys with small parts inside
- Lego blocks or any other small plastic part
- Toys small enough for your cat to swallow (such as sparkle balls)

Dragging or waving around a string is a favorite way to amuse a cat. There is no reason to stop this game forever. You do need to use caution, though. Don't let your cat play with these items unsupervised, and put them away when you are done. Don't leave sewing, fishing or wrapping supplies out where cats can get into them. Be cautious of lace, rubber bands, yarn, shoelaces, dental floss, fishing line, ponytail scrunchies, ribbons, etc. Even though the kitten and the ball of yarn is a favorite image, yarn and cats are not a good combination!



Is catnip safe? We get a lot of questions about the safety of cat nip for cats. We have never read a report of a major problem with cat nip, but no controlled studies have ever been done on its safety. Some cats get too wound up or aggressive after playing with cat nip, and it should not be given to those cats. We usually advise giving cat nip as an occasional treat and not on a daily basis, in case it can cause problems with frequent or long term use.

## Cat Treats

Cats are seldom as interested in treats as dogs are, but some cats do enjoy a snack here and there. Unfortunately, most cat treats are not very healthy. They tend to be loaded with salt, artificial flavors and artificial colors. They are also a long way from being complete and balanced nutrition.

Because cats are so small, usually around ten pounds in weight, it doesn't take very many Pounce treats to overdo it. The rule of thumb is not to give a cat more than 2 of these sorts of treats per day, and we would rather young kittens don't get any at all. Like potato chips or ice cream in people, a small amount once in a while is fine, but if those food items are a major portion of your diet, you probably aren't getting very good

nutrition. Most cats only need 1/4 to 1/3 of a cup of food twice daily. It doesn't take many treats before they are getting too much junk food.

Children love to give treats to their pets and are often the guilty parties when pets get too many of them. Encourage your kids to play with their pets instead. It's much healthier to get more exercise and less snacks!

Here at the clinic, we have small chewies for cats that help prevent dental tarter. Some cats don't like them, but for those that do they are a great way to help clean the teeth without adding many calories. We have free samples in our office so you can try them. Check treat labels in the stores carefully, and try to avoid the ones with the most salt, fat and artificial ingredients. (The same is true for any dry cat food - if the nuggets come in different colors it's because they've been sprayed with food coloring. Avoid these foods. Your cat doesn't need food coloring - cats are mostly color blind!)

[For more information visit our website or our YouTube channel \(BFVCTV\) and view our video on safe cat toys.](#) As always, please call us if you have any questions or problems in regard to toys and treats for your pet. Choose carefully, and hopefully you will have many years of playtime together!

