



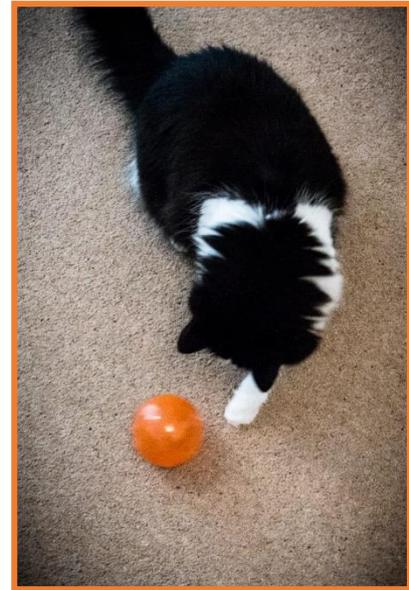
Stanhope Park Veterinary Hospital

PUZZLE FEEDERS FOR CATS

A **PUZZLE FEEDER** is a food dispensing toy that holds food which must then be manipulated by the cat to release the food. They provide cats with both physical exercise and mental stimulation.

Boredom, frustration and environmental stress are common reasons for cats exhibiting behaviour problems, but by encouraging natural foraging behaviour, cats may have a greatly improved well-being and quality of life, both physically and mentally.

There are many varieties of puzzle feeders available to purchase, but they can also be readily made at home using simple objects such as cardboard toilet roll inserts taped together, and egg cartons! Puzzle feeders may be rolling or stationary, and can be used with both wet and dry food, or treats.



WHY USE PUZZLE FEEDERS?

Domestic cats still retain their natural wild hunting instincts, and so the natural way they would get their meals would be to hunt them down by stalking, pouncing and capturing their prey. Hunting requires mental as well as physical stimulation, so for many cats living exclusively indoors, or even those that have some outdoor access, these natural instincts may not be fully utilised and can therefore result in boredom and frustration.

Small prey such as mice, only contain a small amount of calories, and as not all hunting attempts are successful, cats would have to catch several prey meals per day to meet their daily energy requirements. This results in them eating several small meals per day (10-20), whilst exercising every time they eat food.

More and more frequently, pet cats are being kept exclusively indoors or with limited outdoor access for various reasons. Our pet cats are fed by us humans without having to exert any effort to obtain food, and so weight gain and obesity is a common occurrence. Puzzle feeders are a great way to help maintain a healthy weight as well as increasing exercise and burning calories to help reduce excess weight in obese cats.

If you have any questions about your pets, call us on 01325 620968 or ask a member of our team



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USING A PUZZLE FEEDER

If your cat has never used a puzzle feeder, they may need a little training, which should be gradual to motivate movement. Beginners should start with clear puzzles that have many openings so that the cat can see, smell and hear the food inside, and will be rewarded with food for even just gently nudging it. The puzzles should be at least half to $\frac{3}{4}$ full so that the food dispenses easily, as an almost empty puzzle can be too challenging and creates frustration. If dry food is fed, sprinkle some around the puzzle so the cat can acquire a few pieces and nudge the puzzle for more – they will soon make the connection between moving the puzzle and obtaining food! For slow starters, placing a small handful of dry food in locations frequented by the cat such as favourite beds, window sills and climbing trees, will allow them to discover food in novel places.

Gradually increase the challenge by using opaque puzzles or puzzles with fewer or smaller holes. Puzzles with unique shapes such as cubes will also make them more challenging to manipulate.

Stationary puzzles can be used for wet and dry food, and may be made simply from egg cartons, muffin pans or ice-cube trays.



Once your cat is an advanced forager, further mental stimulation can be achieved by:

- Hiding the puzzle feeders around the house
- Doubling up objects by filling a smaller puzzle and placing it inside a larger puzzle, so the cat must work harder to acquire food
- Placing a small weight or objects such as ping-pong balls inside the puzzle to increase the challenge!

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