

SHINE

# Cat Environment

Your cat's environment encompasses their external physical surroundings (when at home, outdoors, and away from home) as well as their internal physiological environment (inside their body). A good environment starts with your cat feeling safe and secure.

If your cat feels stressed or anxious in their home they should find rest and refuge. A poor environment can have serious consequences on their long-term physical and mental health, which then will impact on their emotional wellbeing.

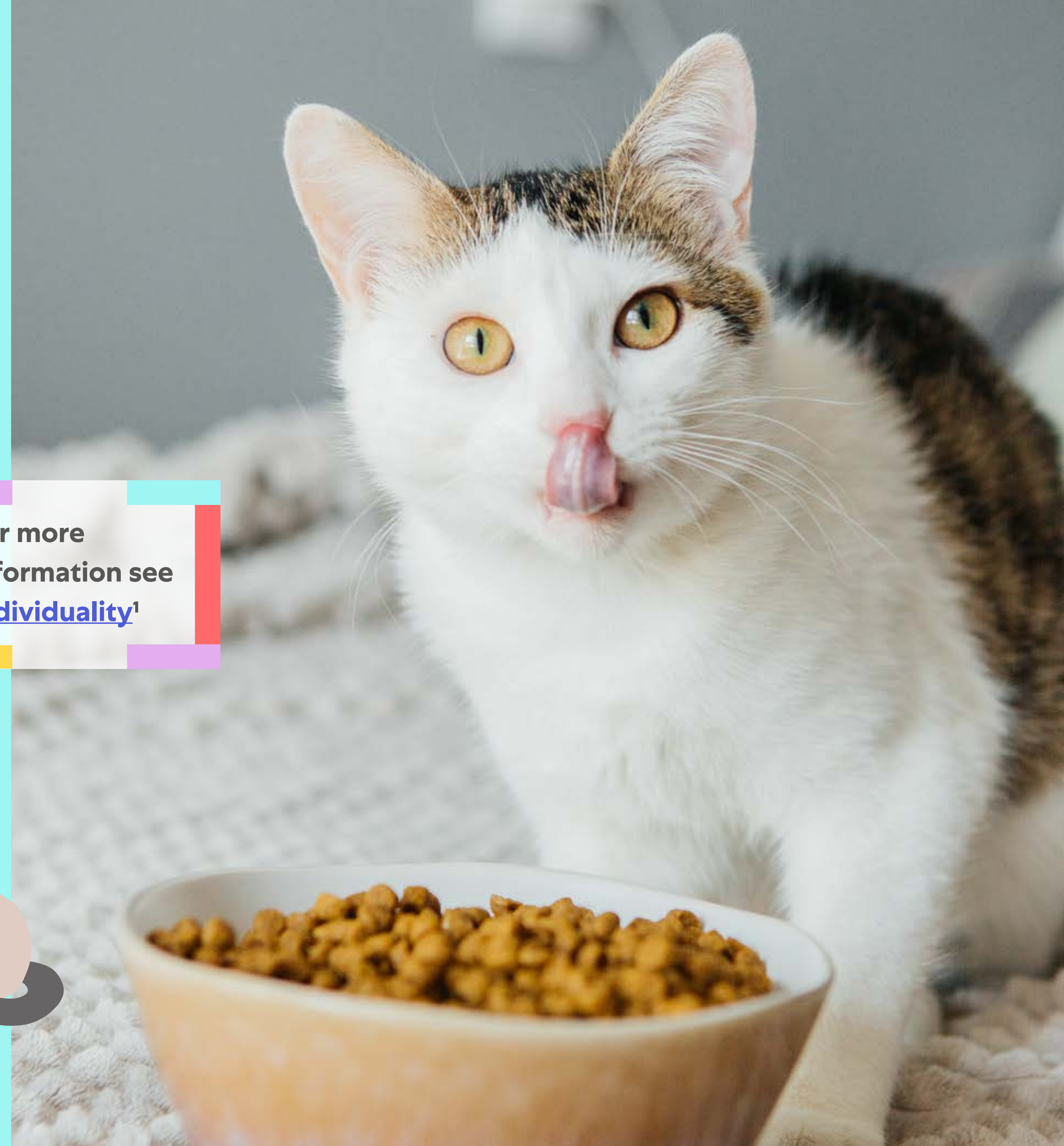
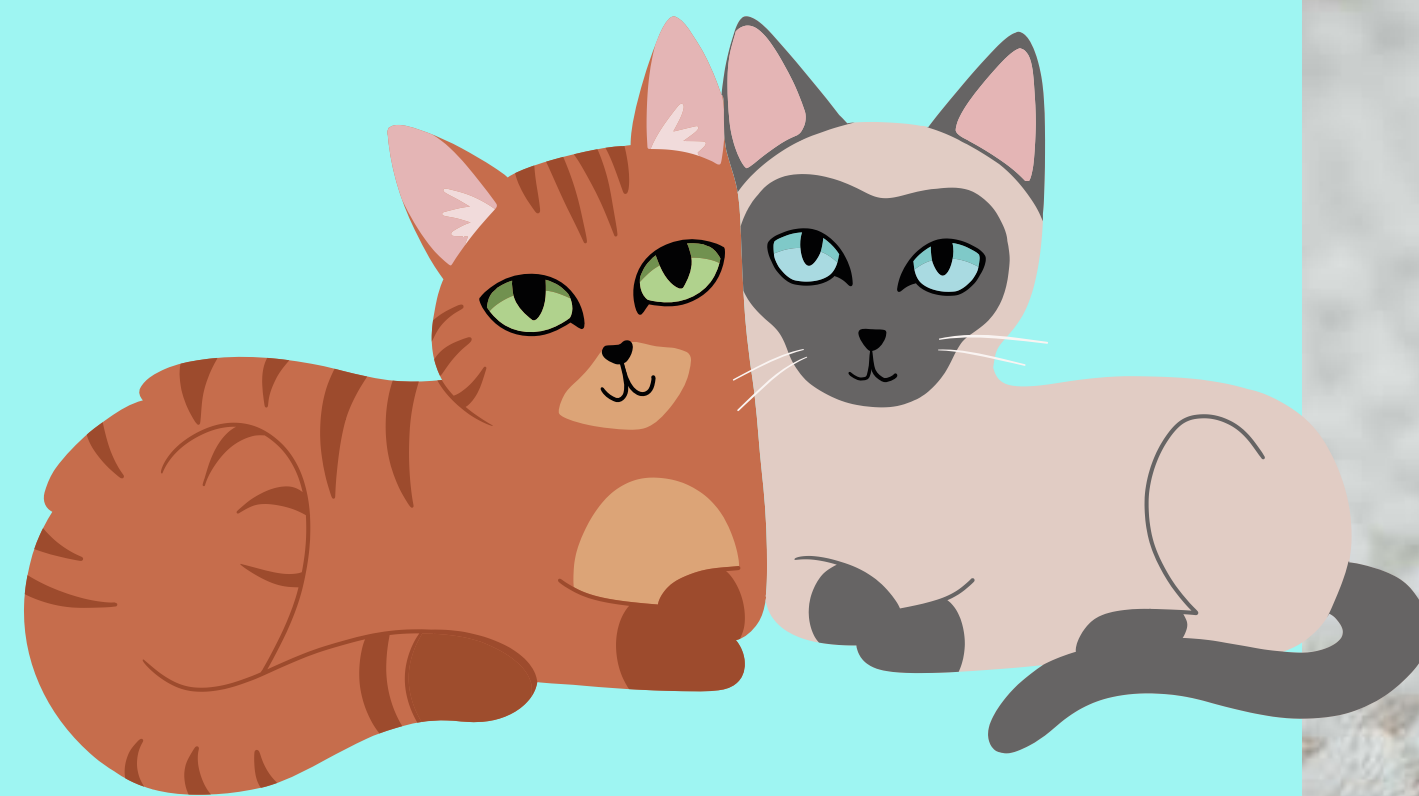


## Your cat's basic needs

All cats should have regular access to fresh water, suitable food at suitable times, clean litter trays, and resting areas with comfortable bedding at all times. If there is more than one cat in the house, multiple resting areas, hiding spaces, litter trays, also water and food bowls are important to help reduce stress or conflict and allow cats to establish social spacing.

Care should be taken when introducing a new cat to the household to make sure they have a complementary personality and that the correct steps are taken to ensure they are compatible with other cats, pets, and family members.

For more information see [Individuality](#)<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Herron, ME, Horowitz, DF, & Siracusa, C, 2020, Decoding Your Cat: The ultimate experts explain common cat behaviors and reveal how to prevent or change unwanted ones, 1st Edition, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt: New York



## Will my cat be happy living indoors?

Many owners choose to keep their cats exclusively indoors for both welfare and safety reasons. For example, indoor cats are less likely to be involved in cat fights<sup>2,3</sup> or the victims of road traffic accidents and it reduces their risk of contracting infectious diseases, like Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV), that can impact their emotional wellbeing long-term (see [Health](#)).<sup>4</sup>

However, it's essential that your indoor cat has equivalent opportunities to those experienced by outdoor cats to optimise their physical and mental health. By providing an enriched environment, indoor cats can enjoy similar opportunities for exploration, play and predatory behaviour.<sup>5</sup>



<sup>2</sup>Sandøe, P, Nørspang, A, Forkman, B, Bjørnvad, C, Kondrup, S, & Lund, T, (2017). The burden of domestication: A representative study of welfare in privately owned cats in Denmark. *Animal Welfare*, 26(1), 1–10

<sup>3</sup>Sandøe, P, Nørspang, A. P, Kondrup, S. V, Bjørnvad, C. R, Forkman, B, & Lund, T, B, (2018). Roaming Companion Cats as Potential Causes of Conflict and Controversy: A Representative Questionnaire Study of the Danish Public. *Anthrozoös*, 31(4), 459–473

<sup>4</sup>International Cat Care, *Indoor-only or outdoor access?*, Available at: <https://icatcare.org/indoor-only-or-outdoor-access/>, Accessed 13 January 2022

<sup>5</sup>Ellis, SLH, 2009, Environmental enrichment: practical strategies for improving feline welfare. *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery*, Vol 11(11), pp. 901-912

## The ideal environment

Though your cat needs access to essential resources (food, water, bedding and shelter) at all times, their ideal environment should extend beyond their basic survival needs and help to promote enjoyment, reduce stress, and provide opportunities to express natural behaviours.

For example, physically separating feeding and drinking bowls from litter trays is not only important to help maintain good hygiene, but it also satisfies your cat's natural tendencies to avoid feeding and drinking near where they toilet. If possible, food and water should also be kept in two different locations as cats prefer not to eat and drink in the same place. This may be due to their natural instinct to hunt away from their water source in the wild.<sup>6</sup>

**Thinking about your cat's resources in this way can help you design a home environment that meets their unique needs and enhances their emotional wellbeing**



<sup>6</sup>Serpell, J, & McCune, S, 2018 , WALTHAM™ pocket book of responsible pet ownership, 1st Edition, Sleaf Creative Ltd: Leicestershire, Available at: [https://www.waltham.com/sites/g/files/jydp1046/files/2020-05/responsible\\_pet\\_ownership\\_book\\_waltham.pdf](https://www.waltham.com/sites/g/files/jydp1046/files/2020-05/responsible_pet_ownership_book_waltham.pdf), Accessed 04 January 2022



## The importance of litter trays

Cats also require access to clean, easily accessible litter trays at all times and as a rule, there should be a minimum of one tray per cat available, plus a spare. So a household with two cats will require at least three litter trays. It's also important to make sure your cat's litter trays are located in safe and secure places where your cat feels comfortable. Inability to access a clean tray, for example, because another cat is guarding the space, or your cat is scared of the noise by the nearby washing machine, is extremely stressful and can negatively affect emotional wellbeing.

The type of tray, along with the cat litter used is also important. Some cats have a preference for certain substrates and may not toilet appropriately unless their preferred type of litter is available. Additionally, some trays are too small or may be uncomfortable for cats to enter. Failure to consider these important factors may result in behavioural problems, such as toileting outside the litter box that can put a strain on your relationship with your cat.

## Creating a comforting, secure space for your cat

Providing beds and hiding spaces in a variety of their favourite resting locations around the home means your cat can choose the place that suits them best at different times. This can also apply to food bowls, water, litter trays, and toys, depending on your cat's individual preferences and requirements. For example, a cat with a joint problem, such as arthritis, may require stairs, or a ramp, to help them onto their favourite spot on the couch or to perch on the windowsill. To find out more about how understanding your cat's personality, preferences and unique requirements can positively affect their emotional wellbeing see [Individuality](#).

Learn more about environment and emotional wellbeing for your pets at [shine.waltham.com](https://www.shine.waltham.com)

