

Feeding Practices & Food Puzzle Use

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In the Literature

Delgado M, Bain MJ, Buffington CAT. A survey of feeding practices and use of food puzzles in owners of domestic cats. *J Feline Med Surg.* 2019. doi: 10.1177/1098612X19838080

FROM THE PAGE ...

In this study, 3192 cat owners were surveyed about what type of food they feed their cat, the method of delivery, and their attitudes toward and use of food puzzles. Most pet owners reported feeding dry food, of which >50% were feeding ad libitum. Only 30% of respondents used food puzzles; most (63%) of the food puzzle users noted that they had learned about them online or by seeing them in a pet store, whereas a smaller percentage learned about food puzzles through their primary veterinarian (13%), a veterinary behaviorist (9%), or a veterinary nurse (4%). Respondents who had stopped using food puzzles cited reasons such as their cat was “too lazy,” never figured them out, or did not benefit from using them. Owners who had never used food puzzles cited a variety of reasons for not doing so (eg, dogs in household, not wanting to attract bugs, having cats with different weight goals, lack of knowledge about food puzzles); this shows that there is an opportunity for clinicians to discuss overcoming barriers and potential benefits of enrichment.

Although the authors noted that more research is warranted to better determine the potential benefits of food puzzles for cats, food puzzles that can slow mealtimes and encourage activity and enrichment can be a creative tool in weight management and obesity prevention for indoor cats, as unlimited access to calories poses risks for obesity. Aligning owner expectations regarding weight management and obesity prevention is important, however; although increased activity with food puzzles can help with begging behaviors and maintain lean tissue and overall mental and physical health, there is no substitute for monitoring caloric intake. Informing owners that there is a variety of interactive toys available can help address many of the concerns mentioned in the survey (eg, cat being too lazy or not understanding the puzzle). Recommendations should be tailored to each family environment and the specific motivations of the cat; a list of ideas/activities and a troubleshooting guide can be helpful for owners who are not sure where to start or who may not initially see the value of enrichment for their cat (see **Suggested Reading**).

... TO YOUR PATIENTS

Key pearls to put into practice:

- 1 Considering that many of the respondents learned about food puzzles online or in pet stores, having visual displays or example food puzzles in clinic waiting rooms or examination rooms may help increase owner interest and awareness; these displays can then be incorporated into a larger discussion on feline wellness.
- 2 Every pet is unique. Recommendations should always be tailored to the specific motivations of each cat so it enjoys the activity; this can provide a bonding experience for the cat and its owner.
- 3 Owners should be educated to not use too many high-calorie treats to encourage use of a food puzzle. If an activity that burns 10 calories requires 100 calories in treats, it may be defeating the purpose of the enrichment.
- 4 Many resources are available for the veterinary staff that can help spark conversations with owners regarding food puzzles or additional enrichment; these resources can also be combined for an interactive list of activities to help inspire owners.

Suggested Reading

- American College of Veterinary Nutrition. ACVN website. <https://acvn.org>. Accessed July 30, 2019.
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- Ellis SLH, Rodan I, Carney HC, et al. AAEP and ISFM feline environmental needs guidelines. *J Feline Med Surg*. 2013;15(3):219-230.
- Herron ME, Buffington CA. Environmental enrichment for indoor cats: implementing enrichment. *Compend Contin Educ Vet*. 2012;34(1):E3.
- WSAVA Global Nutrition Committee. WSAVA Global Nutrition Committee nutritional toolkit. WSAVA website. <http://www.wsava.org/nutrition-toolkit>. Accessed July 30, 2019.

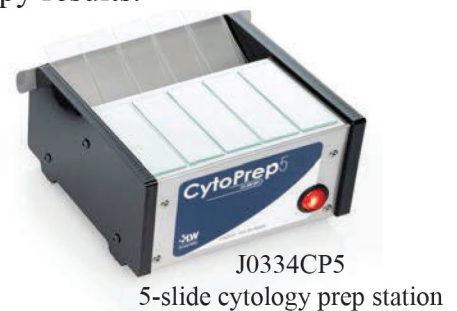
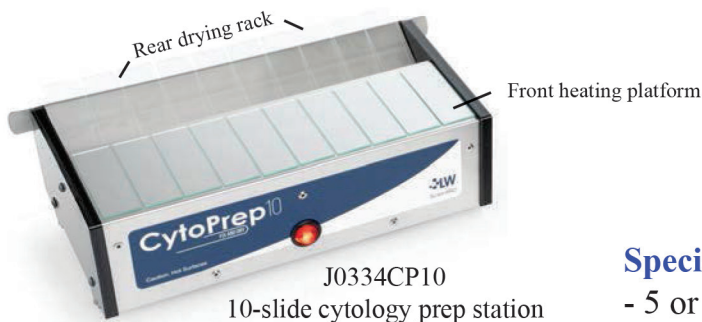


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