

## How Can I Keep My Cat Entertained While I Work?

**CatChannel behavior expert Marilyn Krieger, CCBC, offers advice to quell feelings of guilt when cat is home alone all day.**

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Posted: Jan. 16, 2009, 3 a.m. EST

Q: My issue is not my cat, but me.

I adopted my 10-year-old cat from a local Humane Society in October 2007. Her write-up described her as shy and independent. However, when I got home, I noticed that her paperwork described her needing a lot of attention.

My husband and I both work full time, so she is alone Monday-Friday from approximately 6 a.m. to 4:15 p.m. When I arrive home, I feel obligated to lavish her with attention, feeding her small amounts of food many times per night, playing with her for as long as she will play, etc. I also tolerate her waking us up in the middle of the night.

My issue is that I am quickly getting burned out of this routine. I love this cat, but I wonder if she could do OK with less dotting from me. I have stopped some of my outside activities to avoid leaving the house because I feel guilty when I leave. Also, I didn't enjoy my last one-week vacation because I agonized the entire week about her being alone except for visits from the cat sitter each day.

I am desperate for some realistic feedback. Am I just overdoing it, or did I underestimate the time and attention even a cat would need? I have thought about trying to find her a home where someone is almost always home, but I almost can't bear to do that to her. She seems adjusted to my home, and to make her start all over would be a terrible thing to do to her.

For your information, I am in my 50s, I never had any children, and this is my first pet. Any realistic advice you can provide would be very much appreciated. I really am torn over this.

A: Your cat is very lucky that you adopted her. You are providing her a great home and you should not feel guilty about leaving her alone because you have to go to work. Instead of turning your life upside down for her, provide her with a few activities and a couple of environmental modifications that will keep her stimulated and engaged when you aren't around to interact with her.

Your cat will appreciate your leaving your scent with her when you go to work every day. Put the night clothes that you have slept in the night before on the surfaces she likes to hang out and sleep on. Provide her with a talking treat ball so that she can hear your voice periodically throughout the day telling her she's a perfect cat. Treat balls are hollow plastic balls with holes in them that are then filled with either dry food or treats. In order for your cat to access the food, she has to roll the ball. Talking treat balls can record a short special message, which is activated every time your girl pushes or paws at the ball for food.

Environmental enrichment is very important. Provide her with a tall cat tree, placing it next to a secure window so that she can watch the world go by. Other prime locations for cat trees include the rooms where you typically spend a lot of time. Since cats spend a good portion of their day napping, make sure that the tree has wide shelves for her to curl up or stretch out on. Puzzle boxes and other interactive toys will also keep her occupied when she's in a mood to play. DVDs are available that are aimed at the feline audience, portraying everyday events in the lives of birds, squirrels, mice and other prey animals. Some cats find these fascinating.

Consider adding another cat to the household to keep her company. Every cat is an individual. Some enjoy having a cat friend to hang out with; others prefer to be alone. The history form that came with your cat when you adopted her might be able to provide you with a little background information concerning how she is with other cats. If you do decide to adopt a buddy for her, make sure the new cat is a good match, a cat compatible in age, who has proven that he gets along well with other cats.

You don't need to spend hours every day entertaining your cat, or waking up in the middle of the night to feed and interact with her. Cats love to be with their people; some are happy with just being in the same room with their favorite person; others enjoy quietly sitting near their person or in their laps while watching the evening news.



Although it is important to interact and spend quality time with your cat, you can relax and not worry about her being lonely or needy when you can't be with her. Enhancing her environment, providing her with interactive toys and maybe adopting another cat friend should keep her occupied and happy when you are away from her.