

# Using Food Puzzles with Your Cat

Leticia Dantas, Mikel Delgado, Ingrid Johnson, and Tony Buffington

Food puzzles are an excellent way to increase your cat's activity and mental health by giving them a new, more natural way to get their food by "hunting" for it. Food puzzles typically come in two styles, rolling and stationary. They can be purchased or homemade, and can be used with dry or wet food, or treats.



*Some examples of rolling food puzzles.*

**Beginners** should start with clear puzzles with many openings so that cats can see, smell, and hear that there is food inside and will be rewarded with food for even gently nudging it.

Puzzles should be at least one-half to three-quarters of the way full so the food easily dispenses. An almost empty puzzle can be too challenging and create 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. Your cat will make the connection between moving the puzzle and obtaining food.

For **slow starters**, place small handfuls of dry food in locations frequented by the cat (condos, window sills, beds.). This allows the cat to discover food in novel places.



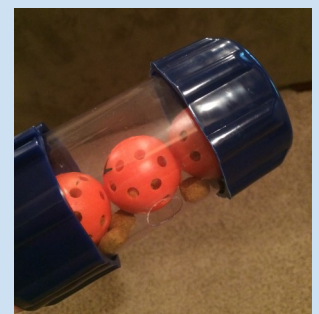
*Stationary puzzles can be used with wet and dry food.*

Gradually **increase the challenge**: use puzzles that are opaque, have fewer or smaller holes, or have unique shapes such as a cube, which makes them more challenging to manipulate.

For **stationary puzzles** begin with egg cartons, muffin pans, ice cube trays or commercially available puzzles (the Catch by Northgate, or the Tunnel Feeder by Trixie Pet). Muffin pans and ice cube trays are well-suited for use with wet food.

## **Advanced foragers may also benefit from:**

- ⇒ Hiding the puzzles around the house.
- ⇒ Doubling up objects by filling a smaller puzzle and placing it inside a larger puzzle, so that the cat must work harder to acquire food.
- ⇒ Placing a small weight or objects (such as a ping pong ball) inside the puzzle increases the challenge, by making it harder for the cat to move the puzzle, and for food to fall out.



*Doubling up puzzles increases the challenge.*

Eventually, you can even feed your cat all of their meals from food puzzles. Food puzzles increase your cat's exercise, allow them to use their minds to obtain food, and can provide entertainment for both you and your cat. For more information, go to [foodpuzzlesforcats.com](http://foodpuzzlesforcats.com).