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## Feeding Challenges In the Multi Cat Household

The multicat household poses many challenges to the pet owner when it comes to food. Not only does one have to take in account for overeating or cats on particular Rx diets but food resource guarding. In turn, cats become obese, may develop diet related issues due to improper nutrition or have increased anxiety or malnutrition due to bullying at the bowl. Developing plans for clients that provide a variety of methods to help ease the stress at meal times can make a difference for the household. However, *it is ultimately up to the client to succeed.*

### Recommended Reading:

Feline Feeding Programs: Addressing behavioral needs to improve feline health and wellbeing

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1098612X18791877>

Common feline problem behaviors: Aggression in multi cat households.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1098612X19831204>

### Food Puzzles:

Food puzzles are stimulating not only for the mind, but fills a niche for the need to hunt for prey. Puzzles come in all sorts of levels of mental stimulation and physical challenges. Whether they are purchased already assembled or DIY, it's important to rotate the toys to eliminate boredom. *Clients should consider rotating toys out once the*

*cat grasps the concept and is successful with the puzzle.* Puzzles that are too challenging for the cat need to be modified for success OR removed and the cat given an easier toy until they build up to the more challenging ones as frustration can occur and create a negative side effect with not wanting to use puzzles in the future. Cats can and do become easily bored and will not entertain toys that do not have a positive side effect.

<http://foodpuzzlesforcats.com/>

<https://www.purina.com/articles/cat/feeding/diy-cat-puzzle-feeder>

<https://petkeen.com/diy-cat-feeder-puzzles/> <- incredibly creative and fun ways using cardboard for low-cost puzzle feeders! My personal favorite is the kitty vending machine!

### **Cat Food Stations:**

Not all cats appreciate eating near each other. While kittens learn to eat by watching siblings and their mom, as they age, they prefer their own space. Some of the challenges are small living spaces that cannot accommodate separate rooms for feeding. Feeding cats at least 3 feet apart can alleviate some of the stress, however, eating in private can be better. While it is not the best situation to feed an additional cat in a bathroom near their litter pans, simply providing a barrier so the cats cannot see each other can make a difference in many situations.

Leveled feeding is also an option. Large cat trees that have shelves where cats can be trained to eat at their personal spot can also alleviate some of the stress when it comes to dining with each other. In many households, such as mine, I feed the cat who tends to be bullied on the counter away from the other cats where she can eat in peace. Each home is different and while some people may not appreciate their cats on the counter tops happily tippy tapping away with their toilet toes, they need to put in the effort to help the cat who is being pushed out of the way or bullied allow a safe place to eat.

Box feeding stations are also an option. These generally work very well for cats that are obese to prevent them from stealing more food, cats on a medical diet or have kittens on a higher caloric/protein diets and other cats need to stay out of their food bowls. Either pre-purchased or made with using an opaque sterilite tub (with a cut out for the cat to eat and some small air exchange holes) the food is placed at the far end of the tub so the other cat cannot stick the head in or reach with their paws. The one drawback is that the other cat may still sit, stare, and wait for the fearful-anxious cat when they are done eating and ambush as they exit from the box.

**Microchip Feeders:**

The latest technology for “feeding privacy.” These work by locking out the cat that does not have the chip/tag registered to the device. They can still be hacked by a savvy cat who is not supposed to be eating out of them by hovering over the registered cat. As they are eating, they put their foot into the bowl and swipe out food as the trap door is open or pull out the bowl entirely. These tend to be purchased first by clients as there is little effort on their end with little responsibility making enrichment tools or feeding stations. While they do work for many households, they do not work for all of them. They also do not address boredom eating, cats that inhale their meals or replace food puzzles. They are simply used to lock out the cat the food is not intended for. Another downside to these is that the cat can still be bullied by resource guarding or pushing the cat out of the way to quickly steal food. They are also not ideal for diets that are wet, or raw fed when there is a limit to how long the food should be out before spoilage. These devices can also fail to open and the cat that is programmed to have a negative response and may develop food/bowl aversions from the situation.

**Feline Enrichment:**

Cats, just like humans, will eat when bored as they have a dopamine and serotonin boost that makes you feel good and over time becomes a habit that can lead to obesity if you are not burning more calories that you intake. Providing the right amount of enrichment for the multi-cat household can help prevent food guarding and bullying. It is important to discuss and address the lack of environmental stimulation in the cat(s) home to prevent obesity and feline guarding behaviors.

<https://catvets.com/education/conference/feline-enrichment-resources/>  
<https://catfriendly.com/be-a-cat-friendly-caregiver/playing-with-your-cat/>