

Feline Nutrition

- Proper nutrition can help ensure that your cat has optimal health, resistance to disease, a healthy haircoat, a good quality of life, and a long life span.
- The best way to ensure that your cat is properly nourished is to provide a high-quality, well-balanced food that is appropriate for his or her age and/or condition.
- When buying cat food, make sure that an AAFCO statement is on the bag or label.
- Cats must eat meat and should never be fed a regular diet of dog or people food.
- Because dry food promotes healthy teeth and gums, it is generally preferred to canned food.
- Always provide your cat with fresh, clean water.

What You Need to Know

Proper nutrition can help ensure that your cat has optimal health, resistance to disease, a healthy haircoat, and energy. These factors can result in fewer behavioral problems, a good quality of life, and a long life span.

Cats require high-quality fat and protein in their diet. They can't be vegetarians because their bodies require essential nutrients, such as taurine, from meat. Dog food and people food don't contain enough of these nutrients for cats; therefore, cats should never be fed a regular diet of dog or people food.

There are many cat foods to choose from, and their quality differs. Name-brand cat foods are supported by research and quality standards to provide complete, balanced nutrition for your cat; if you feed your cat one of these foods, nutritional supplements should not be given unless your veterinarian recommends them. When buying cat food, make sure that an American Association of Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) feeding trial statement is on the bag or label.

Diets formulated for the various stages of a cat's life are widely available. Many specialty diets formulated for specific problems (e.g., obesity, urinary tract disorder, kidney disease) are available only by prescription through veterinarians.

Because dry food promotes healthy teeth and gums, it is generally preferred to canned food.

However, canned food has a longer shelf life, a higher water content, and can be helpful for improving the appetite of a cat that has stopped eating.

Proper nutrition is especially important for kittens, which need more calories, fat, protein, vitamins, and minerals than adult cats. Kittens should be fed a specially formulated, name-brand kitten food several times a day until they are approximately 9 to 12 months old. The number of daily feedings can gradually be decreased as kittens age.

Pregnant and nursing cats also have increased nutritional needs. Ask your veterinarian for details.

Always provide your cat with fresh, clean water.

Because dry food promotes healthy teeth and gums, it is generally preferred to canned food.

Feeding

Cats should be fed in a quiet area, away from busy areas of the house. If you have multiple cats that don't get along, having more than one feeding station can help reduce tension. If your cat is a finicky eater, you can try various high-quality foods to find something he or she likes. If your cat is an adult and does not overeat, you can leave out dry food all the time; this is called *free-choice* or *free feeding*. Your veterinarian can help determine if this feeding method is appropriate for your cat. Canned food shouldn't be left out because it dries quickly, becomes unappealing, and can spoil. Scheduled feedings are recommended for canned food eaters and multicat households in which specialty diets are required. Most adult cats should be fed at least twice daily.

Overfeeding

Overfeeding can lead to serious problems, such as obesity, heart disease, and arthritis, resulting in a shortened life span. Your veterinarian can recommend

Wellness Care

a proper type and amount of food to maintain your cat's ideal weight. No more than a few small treats (made for cats) should be given daily.

Lack of Appetite

Lack of appetite can be a sign of serious illness in cats. If your cat is not eating enough or doesn't eat for more than 1 day, make an appointment with your veterinarian.

Some Foods That Are Bad for Cats

- **Milk** can give your cat diarrhea. After weaning, cats become lactose intolerant.
- **Table scraps** can turn your cat into a beggar and upset his or her stomach and nutritional balance.
- **Do not feed** your cat **chocolate, onions, garlic, chives, grapes, raisins, coffee, caffeine, alcohol, or salt.**