

Cat Food & Feeding

What should I know about cat nutrition?

The type of food your cat eats can have profound effects on their behavior, weight and overall health. In the wild, cats are carnivores, eating primarily meat protein with some bone. They eat very little carbohydrates. Most of their moisture intake comes from the food they eat, rather than drinking water. Many of today's foods contain a high proportion of carbohydrates to make them less expensive. These foods are highly palatable and some cats become addicted to them. Eating these foods can provide cats with excess energy, can lead to weight gain and contribute to the increase in the incidence of diabetes which we are currently seeing in cats. A number of behavioral problems may benefit from changes in your cat's diet and feeding routines. Some kitties seem to have more energy than they know what to do with. Decreasing your kitty's intake of carbohydrates will change their energy levels and the type of energy they display. Providing wet, meaty foods with little or no grain can make significant differences in your cat's behavior, weight and health. The first three ingredients in your cat's food should be meat. Eating tuna fish designed for human consumption isn't good for your cat. Besides "the more the merrier", we have several great points to consider when adding to your family.

What are some common feeding issues to consider?

Excess Weight Issues: Healthy cats typically weigh 9 to 15 pounds and should have a discernible waist. Poor quality food can lead to diabetes and cystitis, which can easily become life threatening in male cats. Many people enjoy having a big cat, but carrying extra weight increases your cat's risk for heart disease and arthritis. Discontinuing free feeding, using feed balls (a "Play-N-Treat" toy, for instance) for dry food, switching to wet or raw food and more exercise (play time) can help your cats maintain an appropriate weight and provide a more enriched environment for them. Sudden weight loss can be very life threatening in cats. Current research shows that cats are healthier when their routines are not changed. Instituting changes to their diet gradually is very important.

Benefits of Meal Times: Regular meal times are important for cats. They thrive on routines and like their environment to be predict-able. Free feeding of dry food can lead to weight gain in cats, particularly as they get older and exercise less. Limiting the amount of food you give them and having designated meal times will help control their weight and will make you the top cat in your house. Your cat will regularly see you as the provider of food and be more interested in your relationship. Having a good play session (10-15 minutes) and feeding your cat just before bedtime can help ensure that both you and your cat have a good night's sleep.

How do I make changes in my cat's diet? It is very important that your cat continue to eat something every day. Your kitty may decide not to eat at all if you just replace the food they love (kibble) with wet food, so slow changes are critical. Not eating for a few days can very quickly make your kitty very seriously ill.

When switching brands of food it's good to make the change slowly at least over a week's time. When changing from one brand of food to another give your kitty 1/4 new food for a few days, then 1/2 new food for a few days, then 3/4 new food for a few days and then switch entirely to the new food. If at any point you notice diarrhea stay at that stage until your kitty's poop returns to normal.



Switching from dry to wet food can take significantly longer. Some cats love wet food and the change is easy to make. Others are kibble addicts and have to first get interested in wet food, perhaps by slowly decreasing the amount of dry food you feed them. If your kitties are accustomed to free feeding, you can begin by providing meals rather than free feeding and then introducing wet food. Wet food should initially be in addition to dry food rather than instead of dry food. As you gradually decrease the amount of dry to an amount your cat finishes in a few minutes, your cat is likely to try the wet food and determine they like it. It is fine to leave wet food down for eight hours/day. Your cat's stomach won't be upset from it.

Where can I purchase good food? The pet food sold at most grocery stores is generally not high quality. Some pet stores have quality standards for the food they sell. Talk with your local pet store about their standards. Ownership of the manufacturers of pet food have changed rapidly over the past few years and the industry has been rocked by serious recalls of pet food. When choosing high quality foods it is important to do your research.

How much water should my cat drink? Most cats don't drink enough water. Having multiple water bowls in various locations and heights around the house may increase your cat's water intake. Some cats prefer drinking running water and enjoy having a cat water fountain. They do need to be taken apart and cleaned every couple of weeks. Cats should have access to fresh water (changed daily) at all times.

Food Bowls. Most cats prefer glass or porcelain bowls. Plastic may hold odors and can lead to cat acne.

Behavior Resources:

Marin Humane's [Behavior & Training](#) department conducts various cat workshops. Sign up on our [Cat Behavior](#) (MarinHumane.org/oh-behave/cats) page for the next available class series. We also have **Cat Behavior Consultants** who are available for private training or consultations (on-site or in-home) at 415.506.6284 or CatBehavior@MarinHumane.org.

More information about cat behavior is available by clicking [here](#) or on our website at MarinHumane.org/oh-behave/handouts.