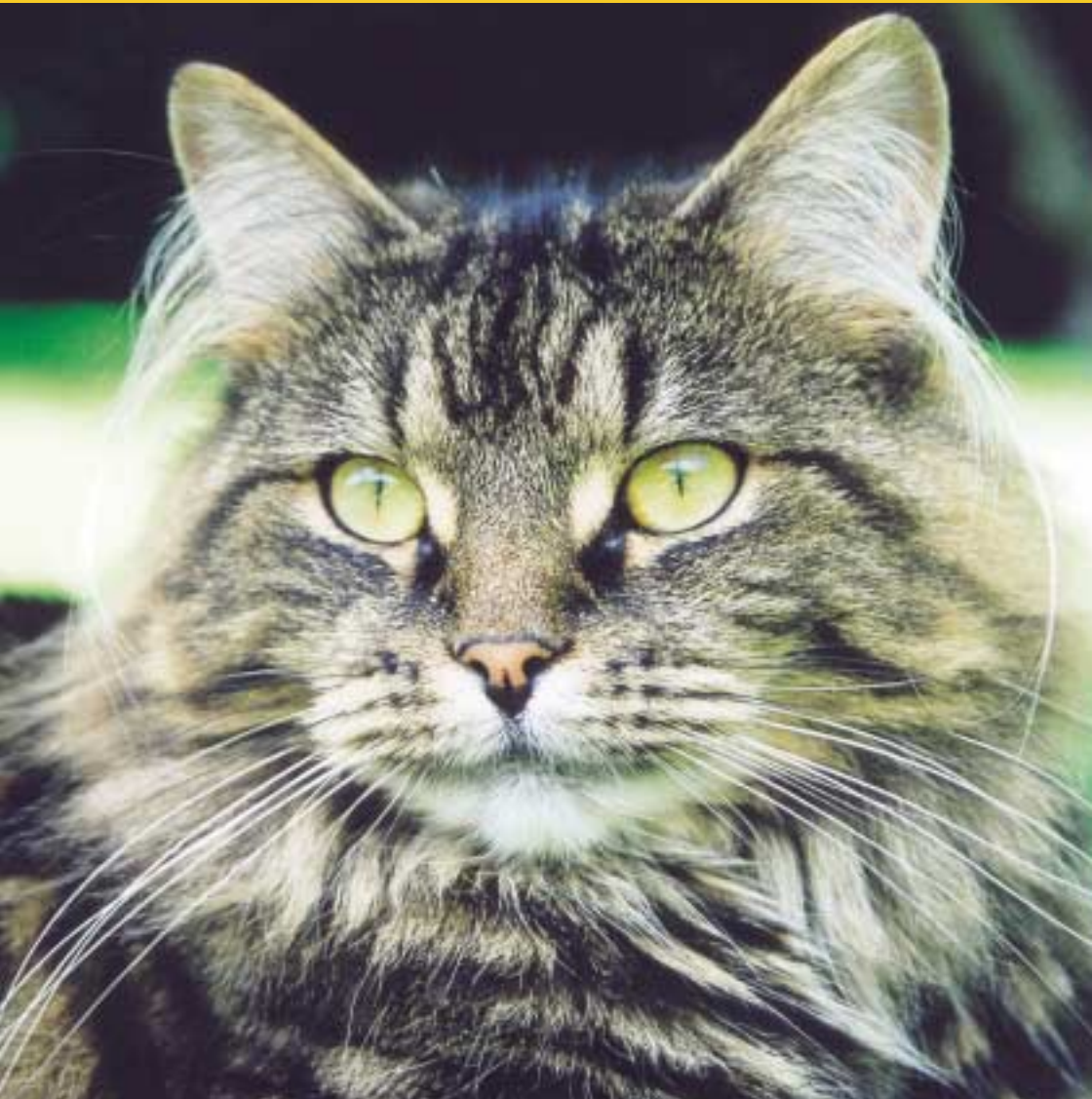




Feeding felines



Healthy eating for your cat

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How Cats Protection can help you

With such a variety of commercial foods available, it can be difficult to choose the best diet for your cat, especially when his dietary needs change according to age and state of health. This Cats Protection guide gives nutritional advice from birth right through to old age.



The pregnant and nursing cat

A pregnant cat and those cats nursing kittens will eat the same high protein diet as a young cat, although the amounts will increase. For the last three weeks of pregnancy your cat should eat one and a half times as much as normal, increasing to twice as much when she starts to nurse her kittens.

Nursing cats will also drink more water and fluids, because of the amount they are losing through producing milk.

Remember

Your cat's dietary needs change according to age and state of health
Any cat not eating for more than a few days should be seen by a vet

For the last three weeks of pregnancy your cat should eat one and a half times as much as normal
When she's nursing kittens this should increase to at least twice as much

Nursing cats will also need more water and fluids

Feeding kittens from birth

Normally there is no need to supplement a kitten's food from birth. If a healthy queen has had a balanced diet whilst pregnant, she will feed her kittens until they are weaned. However, if the litter is large or the mother falls too ill to feed her young, you must supplement the feed or take over completely until her health is restored. See CP leaflet – *Hand rearing kittens*.

Weaning

Kitten food is high in energy and protein and can also be given to pregnant and nursing mums. This makes weaning easier, because the kittens can just start eating it when they are ready. If you're using dried kitten food, water should be available at all times.

How much food?

By the age of six to eight weeks, kittens should be eating solid food and can be fully weaned. They should have four meals a day, but their stomachs are still small and cannot hold much, so only put down enough food for each meal, disposing of any surplus, when they have finished.

Kittens' dietary requirements increase rapidly, so as they grow give them as much as they can eat. If you are using dried kitten food, you can leave it down all the time.



Remember

There's no need to supplement a kitten's food, unless the litter is too large

If the mother is unable to feed her young, you must supplement or replace the feed

From six to eight weeks, kittens should be eating solid food and can be fully weaned

They should have four meals a day, but only put down enough food for each meal

As kittens grow bigger, you can give them as much as they can eat



The young cat

Tinned, and high-quality complete dried food will keep your cat healthy and give the best balance of minerals, vitamins and other nutrients, so should therefore be the basis of his diet. Give him a variety of brands and flavours, but do not let your cat dictate what he will eat.

A normal cat will not starve himself and a choosy cat is made, not born.

Occasionally you can treat him with a little cheese, boiled fish or chicken in its own juice. Perhaps once a week, give oily fish to help eliminate fur balls. Remember, to avoid the risk of salmonella poisoning make sure that chicken is adequately cooked.

Remember

Tinned, and high-quality complete dried food will keep your cat healthy

Do not let your cat dictate what he will eat

Occasionally treat him with a little cheese, boiled fish or chicken

Once a week, give him oily fish to help eliminate fur balls

Ensure chicken is well cooked to avoid salmonella poisoning

The adult cat into middle age

Cats should be fed twice a day, giving more in the evening to tempt him to come in at night. Dried food can be left out for your cat to eat little and often.

When your cat is fully grown, and less kittenish in his activities, don't allow him to put on too much weight, as it will put a strain on the heart and other organs. If you feed him on demand, gradually cut out the titbits between meals and reduce feeding to twice a day. With dried food, make sure you only give the recommended amount on the packet by weighing it out.

Apart from watching the amounts given, his diet can be the same as for a younger cat. If he has difficulty maintaining the correct weight, then consider feeding him a 'light' variety with a reduced energy content.

Remember

Cats should be fed twice a day, giving more in the evening

Dried food can be left out for your cat to eat little and often

His diet can be the same as for a younger cat, but watch the amounts

If he puts on too much weight, cut out the titbits between meals

Feed him a 'light' variety of feed to stabilise his weight





Remember

The correct diet can help with many common old-age illnesses

Take your cat to the vet if you notice weight loss, excessive drinking or eating

A suitable diet can be recommended to aid recovery

Give your older cat the same levels of protein and fat as before

You may find he needs more water than previously

The elderly cat

Your cat will need your care the most during his latter years and the correct diet can help with many of the common illnesses that develop with old age. At the first sign of any weight loss, excessive drinking or eating, take your cat to the vet for diagnosis of any possible illnesses. Then a suitable diet can be recommended to aid recovery.

In young cats, protein is vital to build up and replace worn-out body tissues. In a normal, healthy older cat it is important to give similar levels of protein and fat, that are contained in adult foods. The food must be of excellent quality to ensure high digestibility.

However, if your cat has kidney disease associated with his old age, your vet may prescribe a low phosphorous-controlled diet. You may also find that your older cat drinks more water than before.

The poor eater

Apart from those cats that have been allowed to become fussy, there are some cats that always seem to refuse a fresh bowl of food. If your cat was adult when you first gave him a home, try to find out what food he enjoyed before. Often stress is the reason your cat will not eat, but he should improve and form a regular eating habit, once he has been with you for a while. By following the five steps below regularly, your cat should regain his appetite. When he starts eating, if the only food he will eat is fresh, add a little tinned food to each meal, gradually increasing the tinned food and reducing the fresh. If your cat really won't eat, then a visit to the vet is required.



Five steps to building your cat's appetite

1. Try a range of foods at different times
2. Sit with him when you put his food down and encourage him to eat
3. If he walks away, put the food in front of him again
4. If he eats a little, when he has finished, take the food away. Then try again later with a fresh portion
5. Give a little at a time to avoid too much wastage

Dried foods

Nowadays, more and more people are feeding their cats dried food. Many different varieties are available and it is important to choose one that meets the nutritional requirements of the individual cat ie. his age and lifestyle.

If you are considering feeding your cat dried food, your vet would be happy to advise you.

Pet food can be classified as 'complete' or 'complementary'. Complete foods are formulated to provide all the required nutrients in the correct balance and no other food needs to be added.

Complementary foods are not intended to be the sole diet and other food is necessary to provide a complete balance.

A good-quality complete dried food provides everything a cat needs, except water, and is a practical option for many owners. The quality and quantity of protein are essential factors and it is important to choose one that clearly states the contents so

that you know exactly what your cat is eating. They need HIGH-QUALITY animal protein and fat. Some cats are very fond of dried food, and it is important to follow the feeding guide closely to prevent obesity.

If feeding dried food, cats will drink more because of the limited water content. **Fresh water MUST be left down at all times.** However, tinned food contains about 90 per cent water, which is probably all they need.

Five advantages of dried food

- 1 It is generally more economical than canned food
- 2 It helps to keep the teeth and gums in good condition
- 3 It does not deteriorate so rapidly and can be left out all day
- 4 It won't create unpleasant smells or attract flies
- 5 Some cats with a tendency to have diarrhoea are more stable on a dry diet.



Remember

Different varieties cater for all ages and levels of activity

Prescription diets from your vet can help treat some diseases

Give food that is appropriate to the age and health of your cat

Off-the-shelf foods provide a well-balanced diet

If providing a fresh food diet, check that it is well balanced

Urinary tract concerns

There have been past concerns that dried food contributed to urinary tract problems, particularly bladder stones. This was mainly due to the high cereal content producing alkaline urine, which was more likely to give rise to stones.

Now they are formulated differently to produce a slightly acidic urine and it is unlikely that high-quality complete diets increase the risk of these conditions. However, dry food can aggravate urinary tract problems in cats that are prone to them. In these cases it is advisable to change to tinned food, particularly in male cats because of the risk of urethral obstructions.

Special needs

There are many dried foods available to cater for different stages of life and levels of activity. 'Prescription diets' are available from vets for cats with special problems like obesity or kidney disease. They have helped the treatment of some diseases, so take your vet's advice if they are recommended. Tinned forms are available, but the dried ones are the most economical.

It is very important to give food that is appropriate to the age and health of your cat and it can be positively harmful to feed something prescribed for another animal.

A diet of fresh food only

Since off-the-shelf foods are so convenient and provide a well balanced diet, very few people want to feed their cats entirely with fresh food. If you do, study the full dietary requirement of cats to ensure that you give the right amount of vitamins, taurine, and essential fatty acids. Incorrect amounts may be bad for your cat, so get your vet to check the diet is balanced.



Ten important facts to remember

- 1** Serve food at room temperature and not direct from the fridge.
- 2** Give your cat a little dried food if he has been used to it, even if he no longer has teeth. The gums harden up and they learn to cope.
- 3** Don't feed your cat raw liver – it can cause hypervitaminosis A if eaten to excess. Some cats will not eat anything else, but this **MUST** be discouraged.
- 4** Cow's milk causes diarrhoea in some cats. Lactose-reduced milk is available from most supermarkets and pet shops.
- 5** Don't give your cat milk as a substitute for water – it is a food and will cause your cat to put on superfluous weight.
- 6** Ensure water is available at all times.
- 7** Don't give your cat dog food – the ingredients are wrong for his digestive system.
- 8** Your cat does not need a vitamin supplement unless advised by the vet. It may cause imbalance which could be harmful.
- 9** Never feed your cat a meat-free diet. He is a carnivore and must have amino acids and taurine. These are essential ingredients for optimum function of the retina and heart and can almost only be found in meat.
- 10** You cannot have a vegetarian cat.

Cats Protection would like to thank Eleanor Walls from our Croydon Branch, for writing this leaflet.

AWAITING THE HAPPY EVENT.



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17 Kings Road Horsham
West Sussex RH13 5PN
Helpline: 08702 099 099
(Calls charged at national rate)
Fax: 08707 708 265

E-mail: cpl@cats.org.uk
Web: www.cats.org.uk
Charity No. 203644
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