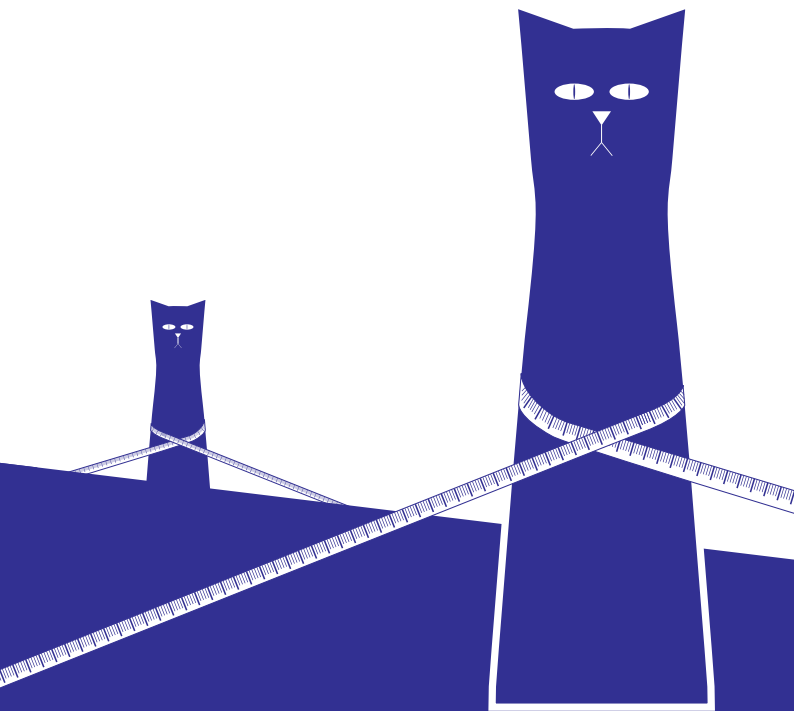


# Feeding



**CATS PROTECTION**  
**ESSENTIAL GUIDES**



*Pop into your local pet shop or supermarket and you will be faced with a whole aisle full of cat food. With so many different types and brands out there the choice can be overwhelming. So, how do you know which one to feed to your cat?*

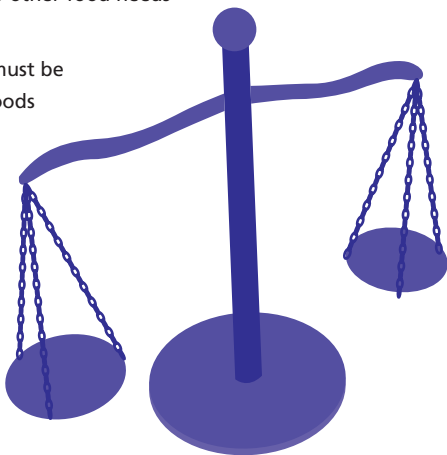
## **A balanced diet**

Like humans, cats need a balanced diet with the right amount of nutrients, so it is best to stick to a reputable pet food which includes everything cats need to stay fit and healthy.

Commercial pet food is classified as either complete or complementary:

- complete foods provide all the necessary nutrients in the right balance so that no other food needs to be added
- complementary foods must be combined with other foods to provide a complete balance of nutrients

Whichever food you choose, remember cats always need fresh water, which should be changed every day.



There is no need to feed your cat an entirely homemade diet or give him vitamin supplements, unless this is recommended by your vet for medical reasons. It is very difficult to provide the right range and balance of proteins, vitamins and minerals that cats need to thrive.

If you have adopted a cat it is wise to keep him on the same food that he has been used to as a sudden change of diet could cause an upset stomach. If you would like to change your cat's diet you can slowly introduce the new food over a period of about three to five days.

### **Remember, your cat...**

- is a carnivore and must have amino acids such as taurine that can only be found in meat – he *cannot* be a vegetarian
- cannot be fed with dog food, as cats need higher protein levels than dogs. The balance of ingredients are not suitable for cats' digestive systems and will not provide your cat with all the nutrients he needs

## **Wet or dry food?**

You can feed your cat wet or dry food, or a mixture of both.

### Wet foods

These are normally available in tins or pouches. Wet food is soft and there are many different flavours to choose from. Your cat may prefer it if he is a fussy eater.

### Dry foods

These can be a practical choice for many owners as they can be left out all day for your cat to nibble on and are beneficial for the teeth and gums. However, if your cat has had urinary problems, your vet may advise against feeding dry food.

## How much?

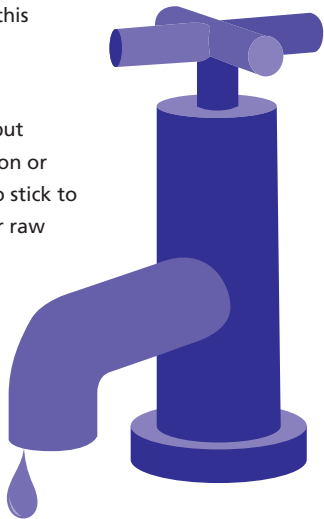
This depends on the type of food you give your cat, his size, age and his level of activity. Follow the advice given on the food packet for the daily amount and then monitor your cat's weight periodically.

## Obesity

It is important that you manage your cat's weight by ensuring he is not overfed and has plenty of chance to exercise. Obese cats have an increased risk of developing weight-related diseases such as diabetes mellitus and many have a poor quality of life. Because exercise is such an important part of weight control, indoor cats are particularly prone to obesity. For more information on indoor cats see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Feline behaviour*. If you are concerned that your cat is overweight, visit your vet for advice as many practices run obesity clinics. Never put your cat on a 'crash diet' as this can lead to a fatal liver problem.

## Treats

Treats are a nice surprise for your cat but they should only be given in moderation or he may pile on the pounds. It is best to stick to cat food treats rather than leftovers or raw meat, although a little bit of well-cooked fresh chicken or fish is okay. Liver can cause serious illness in cats if given too frequently due to high Vitamin A content. Do not feed it to your cat more than once a week.



## And to drink...

Make sure your cat has fresh water available at all times and remember:

- cats that are fed an entirely dry diet tend to drink more water
- some cats prefer to drink from puddles or ponds – this is normal
- if your cat's drinking habits change, eg he noticeably drinks more or less, this may be an early indication of a medical problem so contact your vet
- avoid giving your cat cow's milk – around a third of cats cannot tolerate it and drinking it can lead to sickness and diarrhoea
- specially formulated milk for cats is available but this should only be given as an occasional treat as it very high in calories – it should never be given instead of water

## Why isn't my cat eating?

Some cats are simply fussy eaters but they may also stop eating because of stress or illness. If your cat stops eating, try:

- offering a range of different wet and dry foods at different times – making sure you introduce new foods slowly
- offering wet food at room temperature rather than straight from the fridge – in general, cats prefer this
- tempting a fussy cat by warming food up a little to increase the aroma – make sure it is not too hot!
- sitting down with your cat to try and encourage him to eat

## **Time to see the vet...**

You should watch for changes in your cat's eating or drinking behaviour as they may indicate an underlying problem with his health. You should see your vet if your cat:

- normally eats well but suddenly stops
- has not eaten for 48 hours
- develops a ravenous appetite
- starts drinking noticeably more than usual
- has unexplained weight loss

## **Special diets and life-stage feeding**

Cats' dietary needs change according to their age and health and there is a range of specific foods (eg kitten, senior, indoor, sensitive or low-calorie) available. A special diet may be prescribed by your vet if your cat has a health problem such as kidney disease or joint problems. A prescription diet is only available from your vet and should be used only as instructed. Ensure it is only given to the cat it is prescribed for.

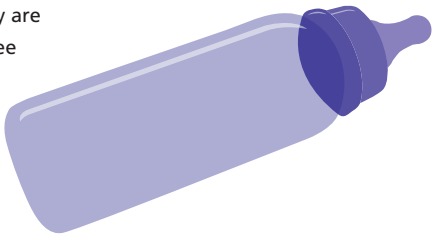
### **Pregnant cats and mums feeding kittens**

Pregnant cats and those feeding kittens need the same high-protein kitten food as weaned kittens. Give a pregnant cat unlimited access to kitten food and fresh drinking water. During pregnancy she is likely to eat a little more than normal. However, when she is suckling kittens, she has to produce so much milk that she may eat two to three times her normal amount. For more advice, speak to your vet or contact Cats Protection's Helpline on 03000 12 12 12.

## Kittens

A healthy mother cat should be able to feed her kittens until they are weaned at six to eight weeks old. You can begin the weaning process by giving the kittens well-mashed kitten food from three to four weeks of age. If the mother has a very large litter, cannot feed her young or the kittens are orphaned, you will need to supplement the kittens' food or take over feeding completely. If this is the case, contact your vet for advice or phone Cats Protection's Helpline on 03000 12 12 12.

Kittens have small stomachs and high energy requirements so they need to be fed little and often – ideally four times a day until they are twelve weeks old and three times a day until they are six months old. As they grow bigger you can provide them with as much kitten food as they want until they are a year old.



## Adults

A cat food classed as 'adult' is for cats from one to seven or eight years of age. An adult cat can be fed once or twice a day.

## Senior Cats

A cat food classed as 'senior' is for cats over seven or eight years old. There are many foods aimed at senior cats which provide the different dietary requirements needed for their age such as a lower protein content.

This leaflet is one of a range provided by  
Cats Protection on issues surrounding cat care.

Cats Protection is the UK's leading feline welfare  
charity and helps more than 193,000 cats and kittens  
each year. We rely entirely on public generosity to  
finance this vital welfare work.

For more information on **adopting a cat,**  
**volunteering for us** or **making a donation,**  
visit **[www.cats.org.uk](http://www.cats.org.uk)**



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Web: [www.cats.org.uk](http://www.cats.org.uk) EG04-2009 **CODE: 4064**

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