

# Feeding

## Cats' dietary needs

Cats are carnivores and cannot live as vegetarians; they need high-quality animal protein and fat. Like people, cats' dietary needs change according to age and state of health. Many commercially-produced cat foods now on the market provide the right nutritional balance—more so even than fresh. There are both tinned and dried varieties. You may wish to feed a combination of the two. Dried foods have the advantage of being more economical, help to keep the teeth and gums in good condition, and can be left out all day. Cats' food should be served at room temperature, as they go by the smell. Additionally, they need a fresh supply of water at all times—particularly if fed dry food. Milk is not a substitute for water, but is a food in its own right which some cats cannot tolerate. *Do not feed cats dog food.*

## Kittens

Normally, there is no need to supplement a kitten's food, unless the litter is too large for the mother to feed. In this case, you must supplement or replace the feed. Your vet can advise you on this. From six to eight weeks, kittens should be eating solid food and can be fully weaned. They should have four meals a day, with only enough food for each meal; as they grow bigger, you can give them as much as they can eat. Normally, kittens will not overeat.

## Young cats (from six to 12 months)

Frequency of feeding can gradually be reduced from four times a day to two. For young cats, a high-protein diet is essential. Tinned and high-quality complete dried food will give your cat the best balance of minerals, vitamins and other nutrients, and should be the basis of his diet. You can occasionally treat him with a little cheese, boiled fish or chicken. Give him oily fish once a week to help eliminate fur balls.

## Adult into middle age (one to eight years)

Adult cats should be fed twice a day, giving more in the evening to tempt him in at night. Dried food can be left out for him to eat little and often. Do not allow your cat to put on too much weight, as this is unhealthy.

## Elderly cats (eight years+)

Cats, like people, are living longer due to improved diet and care; 20 years is no longer uncommon. From eight years, cats are considered older and may start to develop special nutritional needs. Normally, a healthy, older cat is not fed differently from a younger adult. At the first sign of any weight loss, excessive drinking or eating, however, take your cat to the vet. Depending on the cause, this may be the point at which you must consider a prescribed diet.

There is now an increased incidence of obesity in cats; this, in turn, is leading to increased incidences of numerous related diseases eg diabetes and arthritis. If your cat is inactive and appears to be gaining weight, encourage him to exercise... perhaps hide his food around the house in different places.

Don't feed titbits and perhaps consult with your vet as to whether a calorie-controlled diet should be used.

## Fussy eaters

Fussy feline eaters are made—not born. Getting them to eat is often a case of trial and error, with different flavours, brands, fresh, tinned, dried, etc. But a normal cat will not starve himself and *any cat not eating for more than a few days should be seen by a vet.*



*Cats and people – Living in harmony*

Helpline: 08702 099 099 Web: [www.cats.org.uk](http://www.cats.org.uk)

17 Kings Road Horsham West Sussex RH13 5PN Charity No. 203644