

FEEDING YOUR ADULT CAT

Ed Kane

Niles Animal Hospital and Bird Medical Center

7278 N. Milwaukee Ave. Niles, IL 60714

(847)-647-9325 FAX (847)-647-8498

www.nilesanimalhospital.com

WHAT CATS NEED TO EAT

Good nutrition and a balanced diet are essential elements for good health. The ideal diet for your cat includes a good quality food and plenty of fresh water. Your cat should be fed amounts sufficient to meet energy and caloric requirements. Inadequate or excess intake of nutrients can be equally harmful.

Dry cat foods have greater caloric density which means simply, there is less water in a 1/2 cup of dry food as compared to a canned food diet. Overall, the choice of "dry" vs. "canned" vs. "semi-moist" is an individual one, but most cats enjoy eating a combination of a dry food along with supplemental canned food.

Cats in the various life stages, including kitten ("growth"), adult and senior ("geriatric"), require different amounts of nutrients. Special situations such as pregnancy and nursing kittens can dramatically affect nutritional needs. Working cats need more calories, while the "couch potato" needs less (just like us).

Cats have particularly unusual nutrient needs. These include:

VITAMIN A

Your cat doesn't have the ability to convert the carotene found in plants to vitamin A. His source of vitamin A must come from liver, kidney and other organ meats. If a cat lacks vitamin A in his diet, poor growth, weight loss, damage to cell membranes and decreased resistance to disease are among the possible consequences. More importantly, female cats may fail to cycle, the embryo may fail to implant or the pregnant cat may abort or produce kittens with abnormalities, such as a cleft palate.

NIACIN

Your cat is unable to synthesize niacin from the amino acid tryptophan, due to an excess of a certain enzyme. Therefore, unlike other animals, his requirement for niacin must be met entirely from niacin present in animal tissues (plants are low in niacin). Deficiencies include weight loss, loss of appetite, unkempt fur and wounds around the mouth.

ESSENTIAL FATTY ACIDS

Your cat requires sufficient arachidonic acid, a fatty acid found only in animal tissue. Therefore, he requires some animal fat in his diet. Dermatitis and poor reproductive performance are among the deficiency symptoms.

TAURINE

Your cat's taurine requirement is quite high. Naturally he'd obtain taurine, an amino acid, from muscle meats. Fish and shellfish are also exceptionally good sources. Taurine deficiency can produce central retinal degeneration (CRD), a form of blindness. Besides CRD, deficiency symptoms of taurine include poor reproduction and dilated cardiomyopathy (heart muscle disease).

In addition to these dietary peculiarities, your cat requires a high amount of protein in his diet, about 12 percent in comparison to 4 percent for adult dogs. Unlike you, your cat does very well on a high-fat diet. Fat gives him needed energy, assists the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins, such as A and E, and adds taste. Fat also adds to his needed calories, a daily requirement of about 35 kilocalories per pound of body weight.

FEEDING

You can either feed him at least two meals a day or leave food out for snacking. In order to fulfill his needs, feed him one ounce of canned food daily, or 1/3 ounce of dry food, per pound of body weight. Most young cats (one to four years of age) are very active and self-regulate their food intake, thereby maintaining a healthy body weight.

As your cat ages, he may slow down and begin putting on extra weight. Monitor his weight — if he's becoming too fat, consult your veterinarian.

Remember, water is also an important nutrient. He needs fresh clean water daily. Your cat drinks about twice the amount of water as he consumes in dry food, though since canned cat food is greater than 75 percent water, he barely drinks when his diet consists of canned cat food only.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) is an organization that publishes regulations for nutritional adequacy of "complete and balanced" cat foods. Diets that fulfill the AAFCO regulations follow the national consensus recommendations for feline foods and will state on the label: "formulated to meet the AAFCO Cat Food Nutrient Profile for...(a given life stage).

CONSIDER YOUR CAT'S AGE

- For kittens (up to 8-9 months of age): Feed your kitten a consistent canned, semi-moist, or dry cat food designed for kittens.
- For adult cats (1-9 years): Feed your cat a consistent canned, semi-moist, or dry cat food designed for an "adult" cat.
- For senior cats (8-9+ years): Feed your cat a consistent canned, semi-moist, or dry cat food designed for a "senior" cat.

CONSIDER YOUR CAT'S BODY CONDITION

- Underweight cats: Feed your cat 1-1/2 times the "usual" amount of food and make an appointment to see your veterinarian about your cat's body condition. Consider switching to a food with higher protein and fat content.
- Lean cats: Many healthy cats are a bit thin, especially active young male cats. Consider increasing total daily food or caloric intake by 25 percent. Weigh your cat every week, if possible, to chart progress.
- Chubby cats: If your cat is a bit overweight, try increasing the daily exercise routine. Gradually increase exercise over two weeks unless limited by a medical condition. Many cats like to play. If these measures fail, cut out all treats and reduce daily intake of food by up to 25 percent.
- Fat or obese cats: Stop all treats except hairball medicines if needed. Increase exercise gradually over 2-3 weeks if not limited by a medical condition. If these measures fail, reduce the total daily food amount by 25 percent to 40 percent, switch to a low fat/high fiber diet, and call your veterinarian to discuss plans. Inquire about prescription-type reduction diets that can really be effective while providing balanced nutrition.

PREFERRED FOOD

There are a number of prominent manufacturers of high quality cat foods, including Iams (Eukanuba), Hill's (Science Diet), Nature's Recipe products, Nutra Max, Pedigree, Purina and Waltham, among others. Follow the label recommendations, but use your own judgment in determining how much to feed. Always provide your pet with fresh water.