

Feeding and Nutrition

for your cat...

There is a huge variety in the quality, digestability and consistency of pet foods. The foods vets recommend themselves will be based on the importance diet has in preventing many common ailments and diseases. It is important that a cat receives a balanced, nutritional diet. Fat, protein and minerals like calcium and phosphorus help build strong bones and muscles. They also provide plenty of energy for growth and play.

Feeding your kitten

Kitten nutritional needs can vary. Some kitten products are specially formulated to ensure they get all the nutrition they need to grow healthy and strong.

The food you choose to feed your kitten during the first year is critical to their adult development.

Your kitten has limited tummy space so they need to eat often. Your kitten is growing very rapidly in the 0 - 12 week stage of life and should be fed little and often. By 3 months they are more fully grown and feeding can be achieved in fewer meals per day.

A good quality kitten food should be fed as it is specially formulated to promote growth. Due to this rapid growth, any nutritional mistakes during kittenhood will have more severe consequences later in life.

Adult cat food is not suitable for a kitten. It is formulated to provide the nutrients for an adult cat and will not meet the requirements needed by a growing kitten.

Specially formulated good quality kitten food provides all the nutrients needed to meet the demands of rapid growth in a compact form where tiny tummies limit food intake. Since growth is almost complete by 6 months, kittens can begin to be switched on to adult food by 6-8 months of age.

Contrary to popular belief, kittens and adult cats have no requirement for milk. In fact, after weaning, kittens lose the ability to digest milk sugar (lactose) by about 3 months of age. While small amounts of milk may be tolerated, too much can lead to intestinal upset and diarrhoea.

Nutritional requirements of cats

In order to understand how and what to feed cats, it is necessary to discuss how the nutritional requirements of the cat have developed through the process of evolution. Cats are obligate carnivores and cannot be vegetarian. Through evolution, cats have become dependent on specific forms of nutrients only found in animal tissue (certain fatty acids, vitamin A and taurine). These nutrients are not found in plant tissue in a form that can be used by cats.

Cats require high levels of dietary protein with the appropriate balance of amino acids. Most mammals use protein in food to build and maintain tissue and carry out biological reactions. However, unlike other mammals, cats have evolved in such a way as to be obliged to also use protein as a source of daily calories. By comparison, humans have evolved to use carbohydrates for the same purpose.

The domestic cat's ancestors originated from the desert. Subsequently there are many aspects of the cat's life that are different from other mammals. On a practical basis, because their desert origin allows them to conserve water more effectively, cats can drink less water per day than a dog of similar size. Fresh drinking water must always be available. Some cats who get fed moist foods will get most of their water from the food rather than the water bowl.

In addition to these unique nutritional requirements, it is also important to consider the normal feeding behaviour of the domestic cat. Left to their own devices cats are grazers and will eat little and often throughout the day and night.

