

## Feeding Your Cat

As in human nutrition, the goal of good nutrition in animals is to maximize the length and quality of life. It is very important to feed our companions a healthy and well balanced diet that meets their specific needs. Lets begin by taking a look at the nutritional needs of cats.

It is first important to remember that not all cats are the same, just like no two people are the same. Because of this, their nutritional needs can be very different. One thing all cats have in common, however, is their need for a complete and balanced diet. A complete and balanced diet means that your pet is receiving the proper amount of vitamins, minerals, proteins, carbohydrates, fiber and other key nutrients.

Lets examine cat foods a little closer. Complete and balanced diets, those without excesses and deficiencies, help to avoid health problems. Giving your cat the right food throughout its life helps to avoid diseases like diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, and of course obesity. Lets look at choosing the right food for every stage of your cats life. There are many high quality premium cat foods available, such as Hills Science Diet, Iams, Eukanuba and many more. It is important to avoid generic diets that have too many fillers and too little nutritional value. Your veterinarian will recommend a diet that is ideal for your cat and he or she will also have special prescription diets available if the need arises.

We will begin with kittens. A kitten requires a great deal of nutrition to get through her first year healthy and happy. In order to get the correct nutrients for growth, such as calcium and phosphorous, it is important to feed a diet specifically for kittens until they have stopped growing. This usually occurs by twelve months of age. As a kitten becomes an adult cat, her nutritional and energy needs change. As responsible pet owners, we will want to shift to a diet to meet the nutritional requirements of the adult cat. These high quality diets contain carefully balanced ingredients, such as vitamins and antioxidants that are vital for preventing disease. Feeding the right diet at the right life stage can have a significant impact on increasing the life span of our pets.

By age seven, we should be transitioning our nutritional focus to our pets golden years. As our pets slow down, so do their nutritional needs. Premium diets targeted to the needs of older cats contain fewer calories, yet just the right balance of essential nutrients. Obesity at any age will likely shorten your pets life span; however, feeding the correct diet will help to prevent obesity. Your veterinarian can help you determine if your pet is overweight. You should be able to feel his or her ribs, but not see them. If you can not feel your cats ribs, your cat is probably overweight. If you can easily see the ribs, your cat is probably too thin.

Genetic factors, as well as overfeeding, greatly influence weight gain. Some animals overeat because they have access to too much tasty food. Cats in multiple pet households may be influenced to overeat due to competition by housemates. Cats require nutrients in their diet that differ from dogs. They require more fat and certain nutrients in higher levels, such as Taurine. For this reason, a cat should not be getting the majority of its food from the dogs dish. Human

Animal Care Veterinary Hospital  
502 McMillan Lane  
Greenville, NC 27834  
252-758-9971

foods should also be avoided. Cats can quickly become acclimated to many of the foods that we enjoy. Offering commercially prepared treats in moderation is a much better alternative.

The amount of food needed changes rapidly during a kittens first year. Most kittens should be fed 3 times a day until they are 6-8 weeks of age. After this age, most cats are fed one to two times daily. The quantity of food can be determined by reading the suggested feeding volumes listed on the food bag. Regularly scheduled meal times may be better than free feeding throughout the day if your cat is prone to becoming obese.

Your pets nutritional needs are paramount to a long and healthy life. With the help of your veterinarian, you can develop a well balanced nutritional program that will help to ensure a happy and healthy cat!

