

Nutrition for Cats and Dogs

Just like humans, pets “are what they eat”, so if you want a happy healthy pet don't make do with scraps and inferior foods.

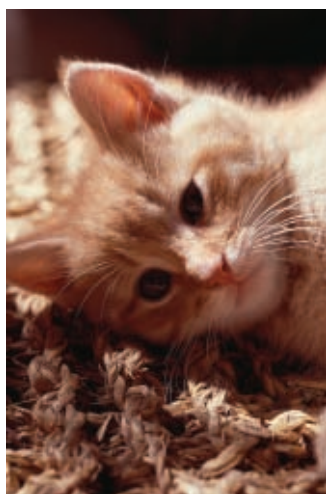
Cats and dogs have evolved differently with many features in their physiology or 'make-up', which give them very unique nutritional requirements.

THE IMPORTANCE OF NUTRIENTS

In order to maintain health and give your pet a long and happy life, the correct balance of nutrients is crucial. Deficiency can result in the whole diet being inadequate. Excessive amounts can be harmful - just because a small amount does a little good, it doesn't mean that a large amount will do more.



A cat's diet should contain 41 essential nutrients, while a dog requires 37.



FEEDING

Food must be tasty, have a pleasant smell and be easily digestible for your pet.

TIPS

- Give your pet its own bowls for water and food and wash them each time after use.
- Ensure fresh water is available at all times.
- If your pet is persistently thirsty it may be unwell, so you should seek veterinary advice.

PREPARED PET FOOD – TAKING THE GUESSWORK OUT OF FEEDING

According to the veterinary profession, since the widespread feeding of prepared pet food, conditions associated with poor or unbalanced nutrition (such as the bone disorder, rickets) are rarely presented at their surgeries.

Prepared pet food caters to all manner of purses, palates and preferences and is typically presented in two forms – dry and moist. These are carefully formulated and give you complete confidence that you are answering all the nutritional needs of your pet.

Cats and dogs should be given petfood that is intended for them – a cat is not a small dog!

Home-prepared pet foods require a clear understanding of the specific nutritional needs of the pet. Be aware that it would not be possible to feed your pet a consistent and adequate home-prepared diet without considerable time, effort and expertise.

TASTY MORSELS

Hand-fed specially formulated treats serve as a source of pleasant physical contact between owner and pet. Dogs in particular will accept food from you that they wouldn't normally eat.

However, it is not advisable to feed table scraps. Food that is safe for humans to eat is often high in calories and can disrupt the nutritional balance of prepared pet food that is given.

Left-over bones are not safe. The bones tend to splinter and if swallowed can lodge inside a dog's digestive tract, causing painful and sometimes fatal damage.

TIPS

- Mix canned and dry food to provide variety and always follow feeding instructions on the packet.
- Feed specially formulated treats – but remember these contribute to overall daily food intake and mealtime feeding should be adjusted accordingly.
- Give your dog 'chewing satisfaction' with a synthetic bone or other safe chew toy.

CHOCOLATE

You should only feed your dog 'chocolate' treats specially formulated for dogs. Human chocolate is toxic for dogs as it contains a chemical substance called theobromine, which they can't metabolise. Symptoms of consumption of human chocolate include vomiting, diarrhoea or collapse. If concerned, you ought to consult your vet immediately.



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LIFE STAGES

Just like humans, dogs and cats pass through life stages requiring different types of food in varying amounts. Responsible pet owners should learn to recognise these life stages and respond to them by providing the right care and nutrition. 'Lifestyle' pet foods have been designed to meet the very specific nutritional needs of pets at certain stages of their lives - from early life through adult to old age.



CATS

Cats eat from their bowls 36 times in nearly the same intervals within 24 hours. (source: Waltham Centre for Pet Nutrition) Cats are strict carnivores and require certain nutrients only available from animal sources. Choose a complete food designed for cats and follow the feeding guidelines on the packaging.

Top tips for feeding cats

- Cats prefer food served at room temperature, rather than straight from the refrigerator.
- Provide plenty of drinking water, especially if serving dry food.
- Be aware that cats have definite tastes in food and can be downright fussy! Cats may refuse food they don't like, sometimes to the point of starvation.
- Avoid any sudden change in diet. Switching food type of brand can upset the digestive system.
- Introduce a new food gradually over a period of several weeks.
- Never feed a cat a vegetarian diet. It lacks taurine - an essential amino acid only found in animal materials.
- Do not refill half empty bowls, especially in hot weather. It is a good idea to give single serving meals which can be served fresh at every mealtime.
- Cats regulate their food intake better than dogs. Complete dry food can be left out for cats to nibble throughout the day.
- Milk is not essential to a kitten's diet after weaning. Many adult cats enjoy a saucer of milk, but can not tolerate milk in their diet. You should feed special lactose-reduced cat milk.
- To check your cat is getting the right energy intake, you should be able to feel its ribs, but not see them.

KEY LIFE-STAGES

Growing kittens and pregnant and lactating cats need relatively more calories than adult or inactive housebound cats and so should be fed on appropriate energy dense kitten food.

Young kittens need up to four times as many calories per pound of body weight as adult cats, so should be fed on energy dense kitten food. They have small stomachs, so small meals should be fed frequently.

At ten to twelve months, your kitten can be introduced (over a 3-4 day period) to food intended for adult cats.

If you think your cat is pregnant, consult your vet for advice. During pregnancy, your cat will need special food to allow for the growth of the unborn kittens.

Senior cats (over 8 years) are less mobile but also less able to digest food quite so well. A diet of highly digestible food is recommended and food intake and the weight of the cat should be monitored.

DOGS

Puppies require the same basic nutrients as adult dogs, but food must be easily digestible and higher in energy. As they grow, puppies need about two or three times the energy intake of an adult dog of the same weight.

Top tips for feeding your puppy

- Allow 30 minutes to eat. After that, remove any uneaten food and serve a fresh portion at the next meal.
- Feed puppy food and not table scraps.
- Puppies stomachs are small – daily food intake should be divided into a number of small meals.
- Puppies like to chew – provide a specially designed (and vet approved) toy.



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Pregnant bitches need extra food during the last three to four weeks of pregnancy. While nursing pups, a mother will need up to four times the amount of energy from her food, as well as a steady supply of water.

OVERWEIGHT DOGS

Loving owners often give too many meals or snack products, especially at celebration or holiday times. In western countries, up to 40% of pet dogs are overweight and dangers can include skin disease, joint and heart problems.

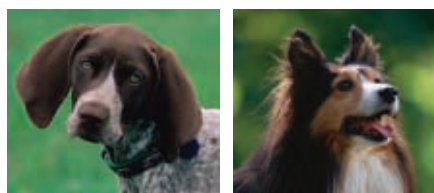
Tips

- Your dog should have only a moderate covering of fat over its ribs – you should only be able to feel your pet's ribs – but not see them.
- Visit the vet for a check-up. Obtain treatment for any medical problems and get advice on selecting a suitable diet to help

your pet lose weight. For further information visit www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk

- If feeding snacks and treats, choose a low fat option and make sure your dog gets regular exercise.

Older dogs should receive a smaller food ration to keep at optimum weight. Give your dog food that has been designed for senior dogs as this is lower in calories. Obesity in elderly dogs will put more strain on the heart, lungs, muscles and joints.



Remember a healthy pet is a happy pet and a happy pet means a happy owner!

The Pet Health Council was formed in 1979 with the specific aim of promoting the health and welfare of pet animals in the interests of both pets and people. The PHC works with medical and veterinary advisers who are experts in this field.

The leaflet range currently comprises the following:

Insuring your Pet	Pets and The Family
Choosing a Pet	Your Pet's Teeth
Fit Not Fat	Practical Steps for Healthy Pets
Getting a Puppy	Stressed Pets
Health Benefits of Pets	The Facts about Toxocara
International Pet Travel	The Facts about Toxoplasmosis
Nutrition for Cats and Dogs	Worm Your Dog
Pets and Allergies	Your First Pet

Download leaflets from the PHC website:
www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk

**The Pet Health Council –
working for healthy pets & people**

Associated organisations of the Pet Health Council include:
Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Animal Therapy, Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors, British Small Animal Veterinary Association, British Veterinary Association, National Office of Animal Health, National Pharmacy Association, Pet Food Manufacturers' Association, Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and Society for Companion Animal Studies.

The Five Golden Rules to Successful Pet Ownership

1. Follow a preventive health programme for your pet that includes:
 - a good diet
 - regular exercise
 - worming
 - vaccination
 - annual veterinary check ups
 - health insurance
2. Observe basic hygiene practices around your pet
3. Respect your pet, you have a duty of care, to fulfil your pet's basic needs including privacy and space as well as love and attention
4. Be a responsible owner, clear up after your animal and be considerate of other people and animals
5. Consider the changing needs of your pet throughout his life.



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