

# Cat Nutrition

## A Starter Guide

Disclaimer: I am NOT a pet nutritionist, nor am I the most knowledgeable in cat nutrition. These are just some basics I've learned in researching for my own cats

### About the Cat Food Industry:

- There is **almost no regulation** for cat food in the US
- Cat food manufacturers **will** try to deceive you
  - They are *not required* to disclose percentages of harmful or unnecessary nutrients
  - There is no regulation of terms like “grain free” or “natural”
  - The nutrition guidelines are the *minimum* necessary to keep your cat alive
- **Nutritional standards** are set by AAFCO (Association of American Feed Control)
  - Food that *meets minimum nutrition guidelines* is labeled ‘**AAFCO Compliant**’
    - Anything else is **supplemental feeding only** (a treat)

### Nutrition Information:

- Cats are **obligate carnivores** and need *high amounts of protein and fat*
    - The *sources* of these nutrients should be *specifically named and animal based*
- | <b>Ingredients to look for:</b>  | <b>Ingredients to avoid:</b>  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Named proteins (chicken, turkey, etc)</li><li>- Named protein meal (ex. Chicken meal)</li><li>- Named animal fat</li><li>- Named animal organs (ex. Chicken liver, lamb heart)</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Vaguely named animals (ex. poultry, fish, meat)</li><li>- Vaguely named By-products</li><li>- Indigestible carbs</li><li>- Carrageenan (thickener linked to cancer in cats)</li><li>- Artificial colors</li></ul> |
- Cats **do not** need *any carbohydrates*
    - The only carbs a cat would naturally encounter are the *stomach contents of prey*
    - *Some* carbohydrates are digestive aids. Most carbs *should not* be fed to a cat

#### **Digestible Carbohydrates:**

- Pumpkin
- Berries
- Fruits
- Seeds
- Leafy Greens

#### **Indigestible Carbohydrates:**

- Wheat
- Gluten
- Soy
- Potato
- Starches

- Cats benefit from **scheduled mealtimes** (2-6 per day) and **portioned food**
  - *Total necessary daily kcals* = (pounds of healthy body weight) \* (20-25 kcals)
- Cat food is analyzed in two ways
  - **As-fed basis:** the true percentages as they are fed to the pet, including water
  - **Dry-Matter basis:** the percentages of only nutrients, with water content removed
    - (Useful for comparing foods with vastly different moisture content)
- Cat nutrition is easiest to understand if you think about their natural diet:

#### **Wild prey contains:**

- Protein: 62.7% dry
- Fat: 22.8% (dry)
- Carbs: 2.8% (dry)
- Water: 69.5%

#### **An ideal diet is:**

- **Protein: 50-70% (dry)**
- **Fat: 20-40% (dry)**
- **Carbs: 1-10% (dry)**
- **Water: 70-90%**

#### **AAFCO requires:**

- Protein: 26% minimum (dry)
- Fat: 9% minimum (dry)
- Minerals: calcium, phosphorus, potassium, sodium, chloride, magnesium, iron, copper, manganese, zinc, iodine, selenium
- Vitamins: A, B12, D, E, K, thiamine, riboflavin, pantothenic acid, niacin, pyridoxine, folic acid, choline, biotin

### Wet Food (Spreadsheet - nutrition % of commercial foods)

- Wet food should be the primary portion (>50%) of a cat's diet
  - Most cheap wet food are better than expensive dry foods
  - Wet food is typically *significantly cheaper per ounce* to buy in bulk
    - Ex. a [10oz can](#) costs \$0.31/oz, while a [3oz can](#) costs \$0.47/oz
    - Open cans can be refrigerated for *up to 5 days*
  - Wet food (if fed alone) is fed 1 ounce to each pound of healthy body weight
    - Determine how much wet food you can feed (minimum 2oz daily) and fill in remaining kcals with dry food
  - Wet foods can be difficult to compare because of their moisture content
    - Ideal percentages at 80% moisture:
      - Protein: 10%
      - Fat: 6%
      - Carbohydrates: <2%

### Dry Food (Spreadsheet - nutrition % of commercial foods)

- Dry food **should not** be the only food fed to a cat (should be 50% or less of the daily diet)
  - Dry food tends to contain 20-50% carbohydrates (due to the binding process)
  - Dry food tends to contain less than 40% protein
  - Dry food tends to contain less than 10% moisture
    - Since cats naturally get 70% moisture from their food, cats who only eat dry food will get [2x less water](#) daily, regardless of how much they drink
    - Feeding exclusively dry food is **linked to renal and kidney failure**
    - Dry food **harsher on stomachs** and **increases vomiting**
- To calculate the amount of dry food to feed:
  - (Total daily kcals) - (wet food kcals) = necessary dry food kcals
  - (Dry food kcals) / (kcals per cup) = % of a cup to feed daily
- Dry foods are *easiest to evaluate by their carb content* (low carb % = usually better overall food)

### **Sensitive Stomach Feeding**

- **Common issues with digestion are:**
  - Not enough moisture
  - Too quick transition to food with drastically different nutrient %
  - IBD (immune system reactions while digesting protein)
  - Food allergies (most common: beef, chicken, fish, wheat)
  - Eating too fast or too much
- **Things that may help sensitive stomachs are:**
  - Higher moisture content
  - Hydrolyzed protein (prevents immune system reactions)
  - Limited ingredients (reduces allergic reactions)
  - Digestible carbs (especially pumpkin)
  - Meal times
  - Slow feeder bowls
  - Soluble fiber
  - Omega-3 fatty acids
  - No gluten, lactose, food coloring, or preservatives