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*

| **Ingredients to look for:**   * Named proteins (chicken, turkey, etc) * Named protein meal (ex. Chicken meal) * Named animal fat * Named animal organs (ex. Chicken liver, lamb heart) | **Ingredients to avoid:**   * Vaguely named animals (ex. poultry, fish, meat) * Vaguely named By-products * Indigestible carbs * Carrageenan (thickener linked to cancer in cats) * Artificial colors |
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* Cats **do not** need *any carbohydrates*
  + The only carbs a cat would naturally encounter are the *stomach contents of prey*
  + *Some*carbohydratesare 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 |
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* 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, ocholine, biotin |
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### [**Wet**](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ywQrwcwOtkc6rcTalh9Kda2miIjc7CrIhIh_Zv_IQv0/edit?usp=sharing) **Food (**[Spreadsheet - nutrition % of commercial foods](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ywQrwcwOtkc6rcTalh9Kda2miIjc7CrIhIh_Zv_IQv0/edit?usp=sharing))

* Wet food should be the primary portion (>50%) of a cats 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](https://www.chewy.com/weruva-cats-in-kitchen-chicken-frick/dp/169229) costs $0.31/oz, while a [3oz can](https://www.chewy.com/weruva-cats-in-kitchen-chicken-frick/dp/43940) costs $0.47/oz
    - Open cans can be refrigerated for *up to 5 days*
  + We 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
  + We foods can be difficult to compare because of their moisture content
    - Ideal percentages at 80% moisture:
      * Protein: 10%
      * Fat: 6%
      * Carbohydrates: <2%

### [**Dry**](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1jS8NllM4Hv7HHGKWyanFZIeKSjROgGQB8LOFMwl7Ojo/edit?usp=sharing) **Food (**[Spreadsheet - nutrition % of commercial foods](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1jS8NllM4Hv7HHGKWyanFZIeKSjROgGQB8LOFMwl7Ojo/edit?usp=sharing))

* 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**](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/464354/)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