

Cat Feeding and Storage of Pet Food FAQs

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



FAQs

feeding guidelines for
Drs. Foster and Smith foods

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How much should I feed my pet - do I always feed what's recommended on the bag or can?

Choose a high-quality food and look at the recommendations on the label.

Remember, these feeding recommendations are simply guidelines, not absolutes.

There is often a wide range listed and there is little consistency in feeding guidelines between brands. You must consider the following, and adjust the food amount

accordingly:

- The actual calorie content of the food
- Your pet's weight (and projected target weight if necessary). Ask your veterinarian if you're not sure about an ideal weight for your pet
- Your pet's activity level
- Other environmental variables (temperature)
- Any additional calories from treats or table foods
- Remember, most pets are overfed and under-exercised - so, if in doubt about how much to feed initially, feed a little less

After you have started feeding your pet an appropriate amount of food, weigh your pet at least once a month to determine if you (and your pet) are on the right track. If necessary, increase or decrease the amount of food slightly until the pet stays at his ideal weight. You can easily weigh your small dog or cat on your bathroom scale - simply weigh yourself while you hold your pet, then weigh yourself without your pet and subtract the difference. Larger dogs can usually be weighed at your veterinarian's office. Remember, most pets are overfed and under-exercised - so, if in doubt about how much to feed initially, feed a little less.

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Which type of food should I feed - dry or canned?

Dry food has some benefits over canned food:

- Dry food is more convenient to serve.
 - Dry food is easy to store.
 - Dry food has less odor.
 - Dry food is more hygienic and less likely to spoil once placed in the pet's bowl.
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- Dry food is less expensive.
 - Dry food may help reduce the buildup of tartar.

On the other hand, many veterinarians are recommending canned cat foods for cats since canned foods generally have a higher protein content (once the increased moisture is accounted for). The greatest canned food advantage, however, is its high moisture content. Water is vital to your cat's health. Since wild prey contains as much as 75% water, cats have evolved to acquire much of their water needs from food. Cats eating dry foods may not drink enough water; eating a canned food would help optimize a cat's water intake. Especially if your cat has certain medical conditions for which you need to increase his or her water intake (such as kidney disease or a bladder infection), feeding canned food may be more beneficial since it has a higher water content. When trying to determine the best type of food for your cat, ask your veterinarian.

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Can I mix dry food with canned food?

Yes, you can mix dry food with canned food, but you will lose some of the benefits of dry food. (You'll have more odor, increased chance for spoilage, and increased expense). If you choose to mix your pet's food, be sure to adjust quantities accordingly.

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Can I feed my cat dog food?

Cats are not small dogs. And your cat's nutritional requirements are not the same as those of a dog. For example, cats require higher levels of protein than dogs. Cats must have the amino acid called taurine in their diet, whereas dogs can actually make their own taurine. A cat eating food deficient in taurine can develop severe heart disease and other health problems. Almost all cat foods now contain added taurine.

Your cat requires a different form of Vitamin A than dogs do. Dogs can use beta-carotene as a source of Vitamin A; cats cannot. Your cat cannot manufacture the fatty acid arachidonic acid and must have it supplemented in her diet; it is not essential for dogs to have this fatty acid in their food.

Essentially, if your cat is to eat a significant amount of dog food, she will be eating a diet deficient in many of her required nutrients. To ensure your cat's optimal health, be sure she eats quality cat - not dog - food.

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How can I stop my pet from gulping his food?

Some pets, especially dogs, gulp an entire bowl of food down in a just a few seconds. This can cause stomach and digestive system upset because the animal takes in large amounts of air with the food. If your pet is a "gulper," place a large object in the food dish (forcing your pet to take more time and smaller bites as he eats around the obstruction). The object you place in your pet's bowl should be something that is too large for him to pick up in his mouth. Try a ping-pong ball for a cat, a baseball for a toy dog, a softball for a medium-size breed, and an even larger ball for large and giant breeds. There are also [commercial bowls](#) available that are designed to slow down the rate of eating. If you have more than one pet, feed them separately to reduce competition for food. You may also try scattering dry food over a large area of the floor or grass, forcing your pet to spend time finding and eating each individual piece of food.

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Can I feed my pet free-choice?

Whether you feed your pet free-choice (providing a constant food supply throughout the day) depends on the pet. If your pet is a "nibbler," and does not overeat, you can put out the day's ration and let her eat it throughout the day. However, don't just fill the bowl whenever it becomes empty, or your pet will probably overeat, and you will find it difficult to tell if the pet is not eating well. With canned food, it is better to feed it in meals so it does not remain at room temperature for too long a time.

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How should I switch my pet from one food to another?

Normal bacteria in the intestine help your pet digest her food. A sudden change in food can result in changes to the number and type of bacteria and their ability to help digest food. These changes can lead to intestinal upset. Therefore, a pet needs to be switched to a new food slowly. By 'slowly' we mean gradually over the course of 7-10 days. For example, make a mixture that contains 25% of the new food and 75% of the old food and feed that for several days. Then make it 50-50 for several days, then 75% new food to 25% old food for several days. Then you can start feeding 100% new food. If at any time your dog starts vomiting, has loose stools, or appears constipated, slow the rate at which you are switching the food.

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Q One of my pets is on a special diet. How can I make sure she doesn't eat the others' food?

If one of your pets requires a special diet, feed her in a room separate from your other pets' feeding area. If you have a cat with special dietary needs, try feeding her on a surface high above the other pets' food (such as a counter or table) where the other pets can't reach it. As another option, place food for a smaller animal (such as a kitten, puppy, small cat, or toy dog) inside a cupboard or closet with the door secured partially open, and make the opening too small/narrow for other pets to get through.

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Q Is it ok to give pets healthy table scraps?

You can give your pet table scraps, provided that they are low in fat, salt and sugar, but treats developed for pets are a much better choice. Just make sure that treats or table scraps do not comprise more than 10% of your pet's total diet. If you do give your pet table scraps, give samples of foods such as a scrap of lean meat. Dogs may like vegetables. Avoid fatty foods like chicken skin, or the scraps of fat you've trimmed off your dinner steak, as well as high-sugar foods like candy and baked goods.

Be aware, however, that by feeding table scraps, you'll typically have a lifelong "beggar" at your table whenever you eat. Further, feeding table scraps may encourage your pet to steal food left on the table unattended - some of which could be hazardous to your pet's health. Be aware of foods to avoid feeding your [cat](#) or [dog](#).

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Q Do I need to feed my specific breed of pet a specific food?

In general, no. Your pet's nutritional needs are not based specifically on breed, but rather on age, activity level, temperament, environment, and physical makeup. Therefore, look for a food that fits your pet's basic health and nutritional needs, rather than breed. And as always, if you're unsure about what to feed your pet, contact your veterinarian.

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Q Does the amount to be fed in the feeding guidelines on a bag or can pertain to each meal or the daily amount?

It usually pertains to the total daily amount to be fed. If feeding multiple meals, divide the daily amount accordingly.

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Q What is an eight ounce measuring cup?

An 8-ounce measuring cup is the type of measuring cup used in cooking and baking. This is the type of cup you should use to measure out your pet's food.

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Q Why does the label say a cup only holds e.g., 4 ounces?

There are fluid ounces that measure volume (16 ounces in a pint), and there are dry ounces that describe weight (16 ounces in a pound). A measuring cup measures volume, but not weight. It turns out that 8 fluid ounces of water weighs approximately 8 ounces. Pet food, however, is less dense than water. So 8 fluid ounces of food generally weighs approximately 4 ounces.

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How should pet food be stored?

Heat, light and humidity are the natural enemies of pet food. To best avoid all of them and keep your pet's food fresh and delicious, we recommend storing bagged food in the original bag with the top tightly rolled down inside an air-tight container. If at all possible, avoid storing your pet's food in a humid environment such as a basement or laundry room. Partially used canned food should be tightly covered and refrigerated immediately. It should be used within 2-3 days of the date it was opened. Be sure to use both canned and dry foods by the "Best Before" or "Best if Used By" date.

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