Cat Food: Senior Cats FAQs

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What types of food shall I feed my senior cat?

Cats, as a species, have specific nutritional needs, such as their need for high amounts of protein, the amino acid taurine, and pre-formed Vitamin A. As cats age, their individual nutritional requirements can vary depending on age-related changes in body function, disease processes, and behavior. Work with your veterinarian to determine the best diet and feeding approaches for your older cat.
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At what age should I switch my adult cat to a senior food (or is this really necessary)?

Veterinarians generally consider a cat in the last third of his normal life expectancy to be "older," i.e., 8-10 years. Of course, many exceptions exist, and if a cat is active and in good shape, he could continue to be fed and exercised as if he is a younger cat. In general, if your senior cat has no medical problems, is not overweight, and is active, your cat may remain on an adult food. Routine veterinary exams and blood testing can help determine what diet is best for your older cat.
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What are the characteristics of a healthy diet for senior cats?

A beneficial senior cat food will contain balanced nutrition including: high-quality protein, digestible carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, a healthy level of magnesium, fiber, antioxidants, and fatty acids. As always, if you're unsure of what food to feed your senior cat, consult your veterinarian. [Back to Top]

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What are the nutritional requirements of my senior cat?

As cats age, their energy needs stay basically the same throughout adulthood. If your cat has a health concern, consult with your veterinarian regarding the appropriate diet. Do not change your cat's diet without consulting your veterinarian.

Some studies have shown that senior cats do not digest food as well as younger cats, and thus absorb less fat. This means that older cats may actually need to consume more fat to get the same amount of energy. You'll need to monitor the weight and body condition of your cat, and adjust his food amount accordingly.

Your cat's protein needs are higher than the protein needs of many other animals. Again, many senior cats may not be able to digest protein as well as they did when they were younger, and their protein requirements may actually be higher. Unless your cat has a health condition which calls for protein restriction, your senior cat should NOT be placed on a protein restricted diet.
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Should I give my senior cat supplements?

A vitamin/mineral supplement is recommended if your older cat is not receiving adequate amounts through his food. This can occur if your cat is not eating a complete balanced diet. A supplement may also benefit some older cats who tend to absorb fewer vitamins, minerals, and electrolytes through the intestinal tract, and lose more of them through the kidneys and urinary tract. Finally, some older animals eat less (due to conditions such as oral disease) and may not receive their daily needs of vitamins and minerals. Some evidence in other species suggests that antioxidants such as Vitamins A, E, and C (ascorbic acid) may play a role in protecting against some normal aging processes.

Talk with your veterinarian to determine which supplements may be beneficial for your cat.
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My senior cat won't eat. What should I do?

Most importantly, if your cat is getting thin and not eating well, she should have a complete veterinary exam to rule out any possible disease problems. For a variety of reasons, some already finicky cats become even more so as they age. To encourage a cat to eat more:

- Warm canned or moistened dry food in the microwave to increase the aroma of the food. Be sure to stir the food before feeding it to your cat to avoid hot pockets in the food.
- Add a little water from canned tuna to increase the aroma of your cat's food. Ask your veterinarian if your cat might also have small amounts of bacon drippings, hamburger grease, clam juice, chicken drippings, or baby food added to her normal diet. (Normally, these should **not** be given to your cat. Only add these if approved by your veterinarian.)
- Switch to canned food (if currently feeding dry food). Consider switching to special high-calorie, nutrient-dense diets made especially for "stressed" animals.
- Feed smaller amounts of food more often. By offering a small amount of food several times each day, your cat may actually increase her total daily intake.
- Ensure your cat has a quiet, stress-free place to eat. Be sure younger cats or other household pets are not harassing her when she eats.
- Pet your cat and talk softly to her as she eats (but only if it does not disturb her).
- If she will not eat a commercial diet, talk to your veterinarian about feeding a homemade diet formulated by a veterinary nutritionist.

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- Ask your veterinarian about short-term use of appetite stimulants.

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