

Choosing the Best Cat Food

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Choosing the Best Food for Your Cat

Choosing a cat food in today's extensive pet food market can prove challenging. With the vast array of choices in today's pet food market, how can you tell which food is best?

Factors to address before selecting a cat food:

- **Your cat's age/life stage** - make sure you choose a food that's nutritionally geared to your cat's age (kitten, adult, or senior).
- **Your cat's body condition** - cats who are overweight or underweight need different nutrition than those who are not. Choose a food that fits your cat's needs, whether it's weight control, maintenance, or another formula.
- **Your cat's health history** - if your cat has medical conditions such as diabetes, allergies, cancer, or digestive difficulties, you'll need to choose a food that is appropriate for that condition.
- **Your budget** - simply put, feed your cat the best food you can afford. Generally, the more you spend, the better-quality, healthier food you'll feed your pet.

Consider Your Cat's Preferences

Cats are individuals, just like people. They are beautiful, fascinating creatures with their own special nutritional needs and definite preferences - some like chicken, some like fish. Some cats like canned food, some like dry food, and some like a combination of the two. Keep in mind that no one food is best for every cat. You could feed a brand of very well-formulated food to a group of cats and find that most of them do great on it, some do marginally well, and a few may actually get sick from it due to food intolerances or other medical problems. Luckily, today's market offers many well-formulated cat foods for cats at all life stages, and it's fine to try several to determine which one works best for your cat.

Look Closely at Ingredients

When you're shopping for a healthy food for your cat, the ingredient list on the back of the bag is a good place to start. Cats of all ages need high levels of protein in their diet. They also need certain amino acids such as taurine and arginine, and fatty acids such as arachidonic acid and linoleic acid. Cats require a preformed Vitamin A, which is present only in foods of animal origin, and may be listed in cat foods as retinyl palmitate or acetate.

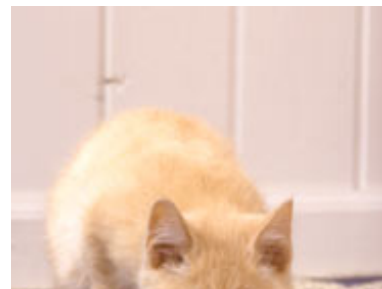
Look for a food formulated specifically for cats and check to make sure that it lists a high-quality protein source such as meat, fish, or egg as the first ingredient. These proteins are more digestible and complete than those of vegetables.

If you are [switching to a new food](#), be sure to allow ample time for your cat to adjust to it.

Categories of Pet Foods

When searching for your cat's next food, keep in mind that pet food is now available in three major categories: "grocery store" foods, premium foods, and healthy foods.

- **"Grocery store" foods** - those found in grocery stores and mass-market retailers - are typically made with lower-quality, less-digestible, inexpensive ingredients and, therefore, are a cheaper alternative. While easy on the pocketbook, "grocery store" foods normally do not provide your cat with the healthiest, most nutrient-dense ingredients.
- **Premium foods** - often found in grocery stores, pet stores, and veterinarian



offices - contain higher-grade ingredients, but may still include some elements of "grocery store" food, such as artificial colors, artificial flavors, and chemical preservatives. Premium foods are usually more expensive than "grocery store" foods because their ingredients are of a higher quality.



- **Healthy foods** - the newest addition to the pet food market - provide pets with the highest quality, healthiest, and most nutritious ingredients. Foods in the Healthy class - including the [Drs. Foster & Smith](#) line of foods, and others - contain nutrient-rich ingredients.

Formulated to provide optimum health benefits for pets, these foods often use real meat as the primary protein source, whole, fresh fruits and vegetables, and fiber-rich whole grains like brown rice and barley. They should not contain artificial preservatives, flavors, or colors. They will almost always be fortified with additional vitamins and minerals, and will use the best natural sources for fatty acids to support the immune system and help build healthy skin and a beautiful coat. Because healthy foods use high quality ingredients, you should expect to pay a little more than you would for other types of pet food. Remember, though, with healthy foods you can often feed less since healthy foods are usually more nutrient-dense than other types of food.

Check Your Cat's Health After a Month

After you've done all you can to make sure a food is healthy and beneficial, take a look at your cat after feeding the food for at least a month. Bright eyes, a shiny coat, and a healthy energy level will let you know you've chosen a good source for your cat's nutrition. If you need assistance selecting a food for your cat, seek veterinary/professional advice.