



FREE GUIDE

Cat nutrition basics

Feeding a cat well, not just often

Introduction

Cats are obligate carnivores — a biological fact that makes their nutrition genuinely different from a dog's, not just a smaller version of the same rules. This guide covers what that actually means for what you put in the bowl, and the wet-versus-dry question that comes up in nearly every new-cat-owner conversation.

Why 'obligate carnivore' actually matters

Unlike dogs, cats can't produce certain nutrients on their own — taurine, arachidonic acid, and vitamin A all have to come directly from animal tissue in their diet. A cat food with an AAFCO complete-and-balanced statement accounts for this; a homemade or poorly formulated diet often doesn't, and taurine deficiency specifically can cause serious heart problems over time.

Wet food versus dry food

Cats evolved to get most of their water from prey, not from drinking, and many cats under-drink from a bowl relative to what they'd get from wet food's roughly 70-80% moisture content. This matters especially for urinary tract and kidney health, both common issues in cats. Dry food isn't wrong to feed, but a diet that's entirely dry deserves a genuine effort to boost water intake elsewhere — a water fountain (many cats prefer moving water) or mixing in some wet food.

Reading a cat food label

Same AAFCO principle as dogs: look for the complete-and-balanced statement matched to life stage. A named animal protein first on the list is a good sign. Be cautious of foods marketed heavily around a single trendy ingredient rather than overall nutritional completeness — a flashy front label doesn't override what the AAFCO statement on the back actually confirms.

Feeding routine and portion control

Free-feeding (food always available) works for some cats but leads to overweight in many others, since cats can't always self-regulate around constant access the way we'd hope. Scheduled meals (2-3 times daily) give you a much clearer read on appetite changes too — a cat skipping meals is one of the earliest, most useful signs something's wrong, and it's invisible if the bowl is always full.

Cat nutrition checklist

- ☐ Food has an AAFCO complete-and-balanced statement for the right life stage
- ☐ Some wet food or another water-intake strategy in the routine, not dry-only by default
- ☐ Named animal protein high on the ingredient list

- ☐ Scheduled meals rather than constant free access, to track appetite and control weight
- ☐ Fresh water available and changed daily; consider a fountain if your cat drinks little
- ☐ Any diet change made gradually, not switched overnight

Summary

Cats have real, biologically distinct nutritional needs — the AAFCO statement and a genuine effort toward water intake matter more than trendy ingredient marketing.

This guide is for general education only and is not a substitute for advice from a certified trainer, veterinarian, or veterinary behaviorist. If you're seeing signs of distress, aggression, or a sudden change in behavior, please consult a professional who can assess your pet directly.