

PART 1  
FOOD SERIES

# FEEDING FOR health

Choosing the right diet is essential for cats suffering with certain health conditions, as Nicole Paley explains.

## OUR EXPERT



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**H**ippocrates once said 'Let food be thy medicine', and he couldn't have been more right. Good nutrition is the pillar stone to good health and the right diet from the onset can help reduce the risk of problems later down the line.

Members of the Pet Food Manufacturers' Association (PFMA) take their responsibility of feeding the nation's cats very seriously. As a result of decades of studies into their nutritional needs, we know that cats require 41 essential nutrients in their diet for healthy body function. They have a high requirement for amino acids, and more recent research has shown that adding antioxidants to a cat's diet from an early

age can be beneficial, to help support various body systems as they age. We also know that certain forms of fibre can help to reduce the risk of gastrointestinal hair balls, which is particularly helpful for longhaired felines.

But when your cat is poorly, how can nutrition support him? Fuelling and nourishment is particularly important at this stage. We know that poor health or the impact of a medical condition can affect a cat's food intake, which can lead to malnutrition. Again, there have been studies into specific feline medical conditions and how specially formulated cat foods, known as dietetic pet foods, can be beneficial as a component in a care plan.

The range of dietetic cat foods helps with the dietary management of cats with a variety of medical issues, including those affecting urinary tract and renal health, skin issues and food allergies,



diabetes, gastrointestinal problems, joint support and recovery, cancer, liver and heart problems. These diets are made to highly exacting standards with a specific nutrient profile adapted to support the cat. Depending on the focus, it may mean the inclusion or exclusion of a certain ingredient, or applying a specific manufacturing process, but they are certainly different from standard foods.

Looking at weight loss diets as an example, pet obesity is a disease with significant health implications for cats, ranging from joint problems to diabetes. However, a survey of vets' showed that cats are the least likely to succeed on a weight loss mission, therefore a combination of specialist diet and a tailored exercise programme is key. Dietetic pet foods are governed by strict legislation and each diet must meet the essential nutritional characteristics which have been proven to help provide nutritional support for pets with the particular condition. Proof of the effects are substantiated in dossiers of scientific evidence. The dossiers are scrutinised and

approved by the EU Commission.

## CHANGING DIETS

Make sure you discuss this with your vet. Generally the advice when switching onto a different diet is to do this gradually over a period of seven to 10 days, building up the new food to replace the old. However, there are certain conditions when this will need to be done straight away.

## MULTI-CAT HOMES

If one of your cats has been recommended a special diet, check with your vet if there are any safety considerations that you'll need to take into account for feeding time. In most cases, if a healthy cat takes a bite or two of a dietetic diet no harm will be done; but the opposite is not always true. For example, the benefits of a diet for hyperthyroidism or dietary sensitivity will be negated if the patient regularly gets into even small amounts of their housemate's food. You may want to feed your cats apart, giving them a set period of time to eat, and then clearing away any leftovers once the mealtime has finished. ■

85% of vets surveyed at the London Vet Show were of the view that cats were less successful at weight loss programmes. Sample of 160; Nov. 2012