

Feeding

As a nation, the British have a real love of cats. The latest research shows there is a total of 8.2 million* cats in the UK. Of that total, single cat households account for 3.4 million cats, while multi-cat households account for 4.8 million cats. Without doubt, there are many benefits to having two or more cats living together – they can provide each other with exercise, social interaction and mental stimulation.

On the other hand, unlike dogs, cats are not natural pack animals and they do not need to be social creatures. They are also sensitive creatures and if their individual needs are not met, they can become stressed. Some of the problems that plague multi-cat households, such as turf battles and litter tray issues, are well known, but providing balanced nutrition is a challenge which can be overlooked. To avoid any dinnertime dramas, it'll help to check the following:

The golden rule

For all feeding and water bowls, litter trays, perches, toys, beds, scratch posts, hiding places etc, you need to have at least one per cat plus one extra, placed in different locations. This will help eliminate any stress your cat could feel having to compete for their daily essentials.

Peace and quiet

Eating is not really a social time for cats. To help promote a more natural environment, place your cats' feeding bowls around your home so they can all enjoy their meal in their own time and space. Make sure you put bowls where your cats won't be interrupted by other pets.

FEEDING IN A MULTI-CAT HOUSEHOLD



Want to know how to avoid inter-cat tension at dinnertime? Follow expert Nicole Paley's advice.

Get diet advice

A good quality general diet may work well for the cats in your home, but firstly consider any special dietary needs your cats may have. For instance if you have a kitten in the household, you will need a growth diet. While a kitten diet can be fed to an adult cat, you'll want to keep a good eye on his weight as kitten foods are higher in calories. Your vet will be able to advise the best options based on your cats' individual needs.

Specialist diets

Many feline medical conditions – obesity, diabetes and renal issues for instance – can be supported by a specialist or therapeutic diet. If one of your cats has been recommended a specialist

diet, check with your vet if there are any safety considerations you'll need to take into account.

In most cases, if a healthy cat takes a bite or two of a specialist diet no harm will be done, but the opposite is not always true. For example, the benefits of a hyperthyroidism or food allergy diet will be negated if the patient regularly eats even small amounts of his housemate's food. You may want to feed your cats apart, giving them a set period of time to eat their meal and then clearing away any leftovers once the mealtime has finished.

Managing weight

Keeping your cats at the ideal weight can be a challenge when you are caring for more

than one. Measuring out the correct amount of each cat's food and placing the individual meals into separate bowls will help.

Monitor meals to make sure each cat is getting the right amount. If one of your cats is overweight but he has a lighter housemate, you may want to feed the lighter cat higher up (on a kitchen worktop) so the heavier cat can't get at the food.

Food and fun

Mental and physical stimulation is so important. Introduce some extra fun and exercise in your cats' lives by putting dry food into exciting scatter toys, in cardboard tubes, boxes or paper bags.

Cats are natural nibblers and will enjoy working for their food this way. Don't forget to take it out of your cats' daily food allowance.

Keep water away from food

Cats need water, but many will not touch their water bowls if placed close to their food. Keep water bowls clean, fresh, well-filled, away from food, and again follow the one plus one rule.

When it comes to catering for cats in a multi-cat household there is no set routine that suits all and it'll depend on your individual circumstances. Keeping an eye on how much your cats eat is important as a loss of appetite can be a sign that your cat is unwell. And don't forget regular weight checks – you can do this at home using your scales and the PFMA Pet Size-O-Meter at www.pfma.org.uk/pet-size-o-meter ■

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