

Feeding routines for cats

Twice a day? Four times a day? Ad-lib?
It's all down to your cat, says Nicole Paley.

There is no firm rule on how often you should feed your cat, it's completely individual and can depend on what works best for you and your cat. Age will play a factor, kittens for instance, need small meals regularly (about four or five a day). This can continue throughout adulthood if it works well for you, or you can make the transition to a different routine if circumstances necessitate.

Cats can be fed in a number of ways but it's always best to try and

accommodate individual preferences where possible. Here are some feeding options you can choose from:

- **Twice a day:** Many owners feed their cat at breakfast and dinner as it falls in well with the family routine. This is an absolutely acceptable way to feed, if your cat seems happy with it.

- **A number of smaller meals:** Cats in the wild would have many small meals per day dependent on their catch, so feeding four to five small meals closely matches their natural routine.

- **Ad-lib feeding:** Food is available at all times and as much as your cat wants, when he wants. This is only suitable when feeding dry food as it won't spoil. There's a danger with this regime that your cat may overeat so you'll need to watch how he regulates his food intake.

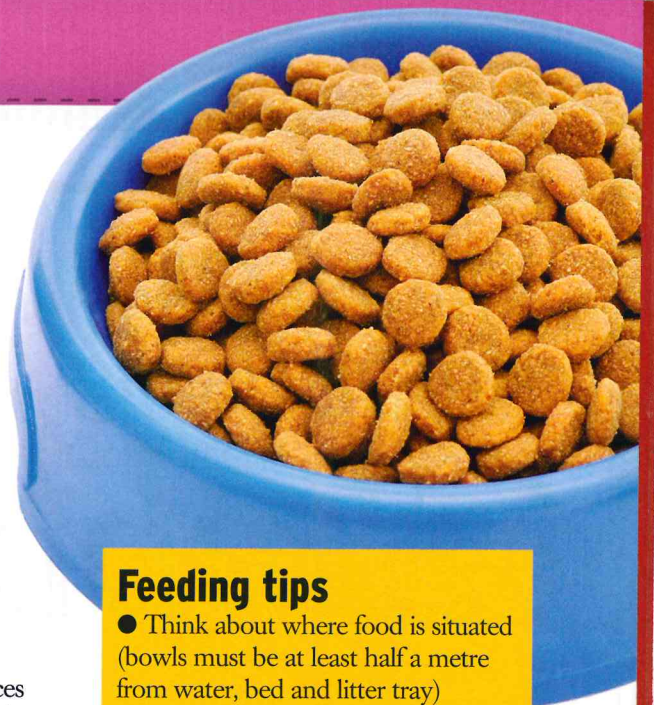
Portion control is vital

Latest research reveals that around 50 per cent of UK pets are overweight, so portion control is vital. It's a good idea to weigh out your cat's food at the start of the day, following the guidelines on the packet. You can then apportion throughout the day according to your routine. Here are some tips for reading the packet's feeding guideline:

- Every pet food packet has a feeding guideline and there'll be a recommended daily portion for certain weight brackets

- While the feeding guideline is based on a scientific equation, it is purely a guide as each cat is an individual. You'll need to consider factors such as levels of activity, whether your cat is neutered etc and adjust the amount accordingly.

- Make sure you keep a check on your cat's weight using the Pet Food



Feeding tips

- Think about where food is situated (bowls must be at least half a metre from water, bed and litter tray)
- Put food bowls in a place where your cat feels safe – away from doors and cat flaps for example
- Don't be afraid to place food bowls on a high surface that can be safely reached by your cat, but is out of the way of any scavenging dogs
- A plentiful supply of fresh water should always be available.

Photo: Dreamstime

Manufacturers Association's Cat Size-O-Meter at www.pfma.org.uk/pet-size-o-meter Other useful tools include a weight and body condition log and food diary available at www.pfma.org.uk/weighinwednesday

Feeding the mind

Cats are born hunters and you can give their hunting skills a work-out by placing dry food dispensing toys with kibble inside around the house. Be careful not to feed your cat more than his total daily allowance, making sure you feed him less at mealtimes to compensate.

Scatter feeding also helps cats indulge their hunting behaviour. You can approach it as a game you can play together – scattering the food for your cat a few pieces at a time waiting for him to find them. Again, remember to take the portion out of the daily allowance.

Play the guessing game

Move bowls around the house to keep your cat guessing. It can help increase exercise levels too but remember food bowls need to be in a quiet place so he can eat in peace. Make sure the water bowl is in a separate area, as cats prefer not to eat and drink in the same spot. ■

Nicole Paley is communications manager at the Pet Food Manufacturers Association.

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