

New series!

**W**hat you feed your cat is the single most important thing you can do for his long-term health. Making savings in the short term could lead to health issues over time that would cost more to put right. Research suggests this is something pet owners are aware of and that they are working hard to get the best value without compromising their cat's diet.

A recent survey by the Pet Food Manufacturers' Association (PFMA) highlights that only four per cent of owners have made cut backs on their pet's food despite belt tightening in many other areas.

### Complete care

The nutritional needs of cats are complex; they need over 40 nutrients in their daily diet for healthy body function. Buying a 'complete' prepared pet food ensures a nutritionally balanced meal that meets all of your cat's needs.

There are very good complete pet foods catering for life stage, lifestyle, taste and the owners' convenience that are available at all price ranges. Table scraps and leftovers from family meals shouldn't take the place of a specially formulated pet food. Cats in particular need taurine, arginine, niacin, preformed vitamin A, and specific types of essential fatty acids. If their diet is deficient in any of these nutrients they can suffer severe health problems. Meal leftovers may also contain some ingredients they can't tolerate, like onions, as well as being a source of hidden calories.

Zara Boland, vet and nutrition expert, says: "Pet food manufacturers

formulate recipes to ensure the correct blend of ingredients according to lifestage and lifestyle. Once you've established the appropriate category for your cat, the main point to consider when it comes to choosing between different 'complete' cat foods is quality. Ingredient quality is a measure of how digestible the cat food is; high quality means high digestibility. The ingredients will be listed on the label and these will differ from brand to brand. (They'll be listed in descending order of weight.)

"Finally, don't forget to look to the experts for help if you need it – manufacturers

often have free care lines for help on choosing the right food for pet and budget."

### Saving money

Once you find the right food for your cat, have a look to see if the brand has a website, newsletter or Facebook page that you can sign up to as these often have exclusive offers.

Do some comparison shopping and make notes of the prices offered in the different stores. Some companies will offer loyalty discounts and even coupons for products.

Buying bigger bags and multi-packs is a more economical way to shop if

storage space permits as it'll be a reduced cost per feed. The pet food label will give guidance on how to store it.

### True costs

The amount you need to feed can vary significantly depending on which food you buy. Don't just look at the cost per kg of the food – look at the feeding guidelines and work out how long the pack will last – then you can calculate how much the true cost per day is which is a better comparison than cost per kg.

Many owners also overfeed their pets because they think the manufacturer's recommended portion looks

too small or they simply fill up their pet's bowl.

The costs of overfeeding your cat will add up and it is likely to lead to excessive weight gain. PFMA recommends you follow the feeding guidelines on the pack while regularly checking your pet's body condition using PFMA's Pet Size-O-Meter and regulating their food accordingly.

### Considering a change?

Any sudden change in diet might cause a stomach upset in your cat. If you're switching diets, this should be done gradually over a week. Start by introducing a little of the new diet to your cat's regular food, gradually increasing it over a few days while decreasing the old food. Follow the feeding guidelines as these can vary between the different pet food brands. ■

**More food and diet advice next month.**



**DEALS ON MEALS**

**For good cat food whatever your budget follow our top tips.**

Photo: Dreamstime