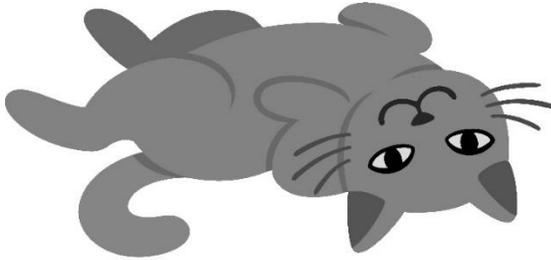


## **Feeding Guide: Kitten Edition**



When we bring home that little bundle of fur for the first time, we all want to provide our new animal companion with the healthiest and most nutritious food.

Sometimes our furry friend comes with their own bag of food or sometimes we find ourselves in the aisle of the local pet store staring at shelves packed with so many varieties of food that the decision-making part of our brain simply short circuits.

Knowing what to feed and how to feed it can seem daunting, especially for families caring for a kitten for the first time.

Our hope is to provide you with some basic information to help you make an informed decision and offer your friend the best start in their new lives as part of your family.

### **How do I choose the right food?**

Sadly, in this saturated cat food market, there are simply too many diets for any veterinarian to know in detail.

The most important piece of advice is to make sure that when looking at a bag of food, make sure the letters *AAFCO* appear on the bag.

*AAFCO* stands for American Association of Feed Control Officials. The *AAFCO* is a private, non-profit association with voluntary membership. The officials consisting of veterinarians and nutritionists are charged with regulating the sale and distribution of animal food (including cat food). They establish the standards for ingredient definitions and proper nutritional requirements. Following *AAFCO* standards reduces the risk of malnutrition.

When you see *AAFCO* on the food bag you should also check to see if there is the word *formulated*. For example, a bag might say- *this food has been formulated to meet AAFCO guidelines*.

Many companies will take the extra measure of ensuring their food is fully balanced by hiring third parties to perform feeding trials to ensure their food meets the *AAFCO* standards. However, most foods simply add the word *formulated*. This means the food company did not perform any third-party trials but instead followed the written guidelines as set by *AAFCO*. You want to specifically look for the statement: "Animal feeding tests using *AAFCO* procedures substantiate that (DIET) provides complete



and balanced nutrition for..." rather than "(DIET) is formulated to meet the nutritional levels established by the AAFCO Food Nutrient Profiles..."

There is a Canadian equivalent called the Pet Food Association of Canada or *PFAC*. They follow the *AAFCO* guidelines. This means seeing *PFAC* on the bag is the same as seeing *AAFCO*.

Here at the Mer Bleue Veterinary Hospital, we will always recommend certain food manufacturers as they are known to not only follow *AAFCO* guidelines but also conduct food trial studies to prove their food provides your furry friend with the energy and nutrients they require.

We will generally advise feeding your furry friend Hill's Science Diet, Royal Canin or Purina. These are not necessarily the prescription versions but rather those which can be obtained at your local pet store or online at [www.myvetstore.com](http://www.myvetstore.com).

The *AAFCO* will specify foods which are designed for growing cats (aka kittens). It is essential to choose these or foods designed for all life stages. Never feed a kitten a diet labeled for adult cats as it will not provide sufficient calories or nutrients.

When feeding a diet meeting *AAFCO* standards it is not recommended to give a kitten any vitamin and mineral supplements. These supplements can actually lead to health issues as they may lead to your furry friend receiving too much calcium and phosphorus, which can negatively affect bone development.

### **How do I feed my kitten?**

It is always recommended to meal feed your furry friend rather than allowing them to free-feed (always leaving food in the bowl). Most cats, when offered free-choice feedings, will become overweight or obese once they are adults. Kittens can also become overweight.

Overweight kittens will have a more difficult time reaching healthy weights once they are adults.

Kittens are pure carnivores. They are very efficient at using animal protein as energy, moderately efficient at using fat, and inefficient at using carbohydrates for energy.

Cats have evolved as hunters and are designed to eat as many as 10-20 small meals per day. Although feeding your kitten 20 times per day is not the most practical option, we strongly advise feeding at least 4 smaller meals over the course of the day.

Cats will also eat at any time of the day (day-time or overnight).

To simulate "the hunt" we advise using special feeding devices. Examples include Catit Design Senses Food Maze, Arklow Stimulo, FUNkitty Egg-cersizer or Multivet Slim Cat food dispensers. These can be found either online at [myvetstore.com](http://myvetstore.com), online or at any local pet store.



All cat species (except for lions) are solitary eaters. In multi-cat households, most cats will learn to tolerate the proximity of other cats while eating. However, this tolerance may decrease in periods of illness or stress.

In many cases it is better for each cat to have their own feeding station. These stations should be located in a calmer, less hectic part of the house. A cat should not be able to see another cat's feeding station from their own feeding station.

It is important to feed a large majority of your kitten's diet as canned food. Canned foods have a lower caloric density (lowers the chance of your kitten becoming overweight) and they also contain more moisture, which increases your kitten's water intake.

The cat tongue is very inefficient at drinking, with each lap of the tongue only providing 3/100<sup>th</sup> of a teaspoon of water. Canned food consisting of 75-85% water is the most efficient way of providing your kitten with sufficient water.

Since cats in the wild will eat fresh prey, they prefer their food to be at body temperature. If you keep any food in the refrigerator, it is advised to warm it up in the microwave until it is the temperature of your skin.

### **How much do I feed my kitten?**

The simplest method is to use the feeding guide on your furry friend's bag or can of cat food.

This requires you knowing their age in months and having an approximate idea of their weight in kg or lbs. If you brought your kitten to Mer Bleue Veterinary Hospital, we would have weighed your furry friend at their visit; feel free to call us and ask for their weight. You can also purchase a baby scale on Amazon to weigh your furry friend at home.

As your friend grows older, you simply need to adjust the amount you feed based on the chart found on the bag or can of cat food. If you are feeding both canned and dry food, adjust the amount to feed based on the % of wet food and % of dry food. For example, if you are feeding 50% dry and 50% wet food, feed half of the recommended amount on the bag of food and feed half of the recommended amount of the canned food.

It is important when giving treats to make certain they do not exceed 10% of the daily caloric requirements, especially since treats are not nutritionally balanced.

Once a kitten is spayed or neutered, their daily caloric needs will decrease by 20-25% when compared to an intact kitten of the same age. This means it is important to reduce the calories your friend is receiving once they are spayed or neutered by this percentage.



When feeding your furry friend, it is more effective and precise to weigh the food in grams instead of measuring in volume. When we measure the food in volumes, we usually end up feeding them slightly too much. Overtime, this can lead to obesity. We recommend purchasing a kitchen scale to weigh the food in grams. Most bags and cans of food will note how many grams/can or grams/cup so you can easily make this calculation.

If you have any questions regarding how much to feed your furry friend, please feel free to email or call us!

### **How long do I feed kitten food and how should I transition to an adult food?**

We advise feeding kitten food to your furry friend until they have reached 80% of the adult weight. This occurs around 12 months of age.

When introducing a new food, you can offer a mix of 25% new food and 75% old food on the first day and increase the amount of new food by 25% daily (also decreasing the old food by 25%) until your furry friend is only eating the new food.

You can initially offer a small amount of new food in a familiar bowl side by side with the usual food so they have a choice. Once they begin to eat the new food you can increase the amount over a few days as described above. The new food should only be left out for an hour at a time.

### **Conclusion**

Hopefully this feeding guide has provided you with the basics on providing the best nutritional care. If you have any additional questions after reading this guide, please don't hesitate to ask any of our Mer Bleue Veterinary team members.

### **Resources**

The Nutrition Assessment 36<sup>th</sup> OAVT Conference and Trade Show, Susan Little DVM, DABVP (Feline Practice), Elizabeth O'Brien DVM DABVP (Feline Practice), Elizabeth Ruelle DVM, DABVP (Feline Practice), Margie Scherk DVM DABVP (Feline Practice)

A Simple Guide to Feeding Your Cat – Hill's Prescription with contribution by Susan Little DVM, DABVP

AAFCO Association of Animal Feed Control Officials- <https://talkspetfood.aafco.org/faq>