

What to Look For in Your Cat's Food



Nutrition for cats is important, as a high quality diet will help keep your new pet healthy. Just like with people, eating poorly can cause poor health and obesity, and, in animals, a poor coat. A nutritious diet can help prevent health problems. High quality foods may cost more, but could save you trips to the vet.

Cats are carnivores, and a species appropriate diet for these animals must be based on meat, as they have little need of carbohydrates in their diet. Grains are in pet food because they're cheaper than meat products, and are needed to create kibble.

You can tell a lot about the quality of a pet food simply by looking at the list of ingredients on the side of the bag or box.

Look for:

- Meat and fat products that are identified by species, such as "deboned salmon meal." If the species is not identified (i.e., ingredients include "meat", "poultry" or "fish" products) then you can't be sure of the quality.
- Foods with meat as the first ingredient(s), and starches lower on the list. Carnivorous animals like cats will find foods high in meat easier to digest and absorb.
- Grain free foods, when available. When grains are used, look for high quality whole grains such as "whole brown rice."
- Whole fruits and vegetables, especially as replacement for grains in food, high up on the ingredients list.
- Organic ingredients.

Avoid:

- Foods that contain unidentified "meat," "animal," "poultry," or "fish" products in their food.
- Any sort of meat by-products, especially of an indeterminate origin. By-products may contain high quality ingredients, but can also contain parts of an animal that do not contain any nutritional benefit (such as beaks and feathers).
- Artificial colours, flavours, sweeteners or preservatives, especially BHT, BHA, Ethoxyquin, Propyl Gallate.
- Grain fragments.
- Corn and soy. Corn is a cost effective though non-nutritious filler that is hard for pets to digest and a common allergen. Soy is another cheap and non-nutritious additive.

Most high quality pet foods are sold in pet supply stores, feed stores, or co-ops. Grocery stores are generally not good sources of quality pet food.

Wet food can make a great addition to your cat's diet. Many cats don't drink enough water and adding wet food to their daily routine can help keep them well hydrated. Keeping your cat well hydrated can also help prevent lower urinary tract diseases in the future.

We provide you with a small amount of the diet we feed here and recommend you transition your cat to the food of your choice slowly. Start with a mixture of 25% new food and 75% old food, and over the course of five days transition to 100% new food.

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CAT FOOD SCORE SHEET

You can use the following score sheet to help determine the relative quality of any bag of dry cat food or can of wet cat food, based on the list of ingredients in that food.

To grade your cat's food:

- Start with a score of 100
- For each ingredient(s) listed below, add or subtract the points indicated.
- The higher the score, the better the food.

| Ingredient | Points |
|---|--------|
| For each by-product listed | -10 |
| For each nonspecific animal source ("meat" or "poultry", meat, meal or fat) | -10 |
| Contains BHA, BHT or ethoxyquin | -10 |
| Non-specific grain source or "mill run" | -5 |
| Same grain ingredient is used 2 or more times in the first five ingredients (ie "ground brown rice", "brewers rice" , "rice flour are all the same grain | -5 |
| Protein sources are not meat meal and less than 2 meats in the top 3 ingredients | -3 |
| Any artificial colorants | -3 |
| Contains ground corn or whole grain corn | -3 |
| Also if corn is listed in the first 5 ingredients | -2 |
| Any animal fat other than fish oils | -2 |
| Lamb is the only animal protein source (unless hypoallergenic) | -2 |
| Contains soy or soybeans | -2 |
| Contains wheat | -2 |
| Contains beef | -1 |
| Contains salt (NaCl) | -1 |
| Any of the meat sources are organic | +5 |
| Endorsed by a nutritionist | +5 |
| Food is baked, not extruded | +5 |
| Contains probiotics | +3 |
| Food is grain-free | +3 |
| Contains fish oil | +2 |
| Animal sources are hormone-free and antibiotic-free | +2 |
| Contains more than 2 fruits and vegetables, but less than 6 | +2 |
| Contains flax seed oil (not the seeds) | +2 |
| Contains oats or oatmeal | +1 |
| Contains sunflower oil | +1 |
| For every different specific animal protein source | +1 |
| Contains glucosamine and chondroitin | +1 |
| Fruits and Vegetables have been tested for pesticides and are pesticide-free | +1 |

Generally, the cats at Homeward Pet are fed Kirkland Maintenance brand dry cat food during their stay at the shelter, which scores 97 on the above scale. As needed, we will mix in up to 25% of similar quality food. Our cats are fed a variety of wet foods at the shelter, including Innova (score 102), NutroMax (101) and Wellness (94).

Cat Food Score Sheet adapted from score sheet created by Dr. Brad Evergreen, Evergreen Holistic Veterinary Care, Inc., Monroe, WA, www.evergreenholisticvet.com, 360-794-VETS (8387), and from information from Cats Exclusive Veterinary Clinic, Shoreline, WA, <http://www.catsexclusive.com> 206-546-CATS (5758). Homeward Pet Adoption Center is providing this information as a courtesy. If you have any questions, we recommend you consult a veterinarian or animal nutritional expert to determine the appropriate food for your individual cat.