



Food Facts

Expert health and behavior advice from the feline care professionals at
Paws, Whiskers & Claws
The Feline Hospital
www.pawswiskersandclaws.com

The choices you make about what and how to feed your cat go far beyond simply filling her belly; there are medical and behavioral issues to consider. Though you may save a couple of dollars up front by feeding grocery-store brands, you will spend far more treating the problems that result.

At Paws, Whiskers & Claws, we urge you to understand how diet affects your cat's entire life, and to weigh the long-term costs of feeding the wrong food. We're happy to answer your questions and to help you design the right food plan for your feline companion. **We recommend Hill's Science Diet dry and canned feline diets; that's what we choose to feed our own cats.**

Medical and Behavioral Considerations

Even if your cat seems perfectly healthy now, her diet can either help keep her healthy or it can lead to problems, including those described below.

Urinary Disorders

Cats are prone to urinary disorders caused by changes in the pH levels of the urine and the level of the magnesium and phosphorus in the food. Some cats are genetically predisposed to urinary problems, so prevention is vital.

Many brands of cat food contain high levels of magnesium and phosphorous, which cause urinary crystals or stones. These crystals, which resemble pieces of broken glass, irritate the cat's bladder and urethra, and cause extreme pain during urination. That often causes cats to urinate outside the litter box: it's how they tell you that they are in pain.

At PWC, we see fewer urinary problems in cats that eat Science Diet. All Science Diet maintenance foods are formulated to produce a lower urine pH (slightly acidic urine) that helps prevent formation of urinary crystals.

Urinary Obstruction (Blockage)

Sometimes the urinary crystals bind with mucous, bacteria, or protein, blocking the cat's urinary tract and making it impossible for them to urinate. This condition is **life-threatening**. The urethra of a male cat is smaller than that of a female cat, so males have an increased risk of obstruction. The inability to eliminate urine leads to a buildup of waste products in the blood, poisoning the body. In as little as 24 hours, this condition can be fatal. The pH balanced Science Diet foods reduce the possibility of urinary obstruction.

Though some cat food brands claim to meet nutritional standards and are specially formulated for urinary tract health, they don't offer enough of the pH balancing benefits that are critical to your cat's urinary health.

Finicky Eaters

Cats are sensitive to the shape and texture of their food, not just the taste. The cutesy shapes of most cat food brands make cats reluctant to switch to a different diet. Most Science Diet kibble is the same shape and texture, which makes it easier for cats to accept.

Other Medical Conditions

Currently Hill's, the maker of Science Diet, is the leading company with a complete line of prescription diets for cats, including diets for kidney disease, liver disease, intestinal ailments, prevention of struvite and calcium oxalate crystals, and management of weight, food allergies, and diabetes.

Most cats will require a special diet at some point in their lives. Hill's Prescription Diet foods share the same size and shape of kibble. By feeding your cat Science Diet now, it will be much easier to transition your cat to a Prescription Diet later.

How Should I Feed My Cat?

We recommend free feeding, which means giving your cat access to dry food at all times. In the wild, cats graze, eating 9-16 times a day. It's unnatural to force them to eat just 2 or 3 meals daily.

Free feeding prevents the stress and fear that some cats feel when they find their food dish empty, and stress often leads to behavior problems. A meal-fed cat will often eat too quickly because they are hungry and may be competing for that food with their feline housemates, which leads to vomiting of undigested food.

If your cat is overweight, switch to a lower calorie food but continue to free-feed. Strange as it may seem, reducing the amount of food available to your cat will cause her metabolic rate to drop, and she may actually *gain* weight.

In a multi-cat household, you must provide sufficient resources so that the cats don't have to compete (which also causes stress). Place multiple feeding stations in your home, and spread them out so that they aren't concentrated in one area.

Foraging

We strongly encourage foraging as a means of free-feeding. Filling appropriate food-dispensing containers with dry kibble provides a more natural "hunting" environment for your cat. It allows them to free-feed, but at the same time it provides enrichment and mental stimulation because they must find and manipulate the container to get the food. Hide them around your home for your cat to hunt. You can purchase foraging toys from us or make them yourself.

Hint: You can fill the foraging toy with a high-quality food that's different from their usual diet, making the foraging toy more of a "treat". For example, Science Diet Oral Care or Prescription Diet t/d formulas are especially good for cleaning your cat's teeth.

Why Science Diet?

In addition to the factors already mentioned, Science Diet foods contain less “fillers”. Your cat will need to eat less to feel full and to meet her nutritional needs, so you will end up buying less food. You may notice that your cat will have fewer bowel movements when fed Science Diet because it is better absorbed by the body and therefore produces less waste so there is less feces to scoop from the box. Their feces will also tend to have less odor.

Science Diet offers a wide variety of flavors and formulas for all stages of your cat’s life.

What About Canned Food and Treats?

Contrary to popular myth, canned food is not bad for your cat’s teeth. We recommend feeding canned food at least once a day. Canned food provides added moisture which helps prevent urinary tract disease. In addition, you can more easily monitor your cat’s canned food intake; changes in eating habits can signal a medical issue. You can also hide most medication in canned food for cats that are difficult to pill.

Remember that the same considerations apply to your choice of canned foods as well as dry foods. Again, we recommend Science Diet. Avoid the temptation to buy the canned food based on advertising that appeals to *your* tastes rather than to your cat’s needs.

Weight Loss Plan

Canned (wet) food can be used in a weight loss plan for your cat. Canned food has more protein and fewer carbohydrates than dry kibble. Feed canned food at mealtime and provide kibble in foraging toys to encourage your kitty to be more active while free-feeding through the day.

Treats

Treats can be an important tool in gaining your cat’s trust, forming a bond, and rewarding good behavior. But you can provide healthy treats that your cat will love just as much as other brands. What you give as a treat doesn’t have to be sold as treats. You can use a food different than what they are normally fed.

- Science Diet Oral Care and Prescription Diet t/d are tasty dental diets that also help keep your cat’s teeth and gums clean and healthy.

How Much Does It Cost?

Studies have been conducted on the cost to feed different brands of food. Because Science Diet has higher quality nutrients and your cat will eat less, it ends up costing the same to feed Science Diet as it does to feed grocery store brands.

Science Diet is 100% guaranteed. If your cat does not love the taste, you can return the unused portion and receive a full refund.

Cost Comparison of Science Diet vs. Leading Grocery Brands

Kitten		Cost per day
Science Diet Kitten	4 lb. bag	23¢
Purina Kitten Chow	3.5 lb. bag	27¢
Feline Adult		Cost per day
Science Diet Adult	4 lb. bag	28¢
Meow Mix	3.5 lb. bag	23¢
Feline Senior		Cost per day
Science Diet Senior 7+	4 lb. bag	23¢
Purina Senior Cat Chow	3.5 lb. bag	21¢

(2003 comparison; based on a 5 lb. kitten and 10 lb. adult and senior cats.)

Science Diet is available from many pet supply stores and online merchants. You can save money by comparing prices and by purchasing larger bags. Be sure to store food in a cool dry place to maintain freshness!

What About By-products and Grains in Cat Food?

Some cat food brands try to tempt owners with claims that their product is made from human-grade ingredients with no by-products or grains. Those claims may appeal to you, but they are unnecessary as far as your cat is concerned.

Cats are carnivores (meat-eaters). Typically carnivores hunt herbivores (grain eaters) such as birds and rodents. The first thing they do after they kill their prey is remove and eat the nutrient-rich internal organs, including the grain-filled gastrointestinal tract. They will eat the entire carcass: flesh, organs, ingested grains, and the so-called "by-products". These are all part of a normal feline diet. There's no need to avoid by-products or grains in your cat's diet.

Should My Cat Eat a Raw Diet?

If you want to provide your cat with a fresh kill each day, that's fine. However, the rules for handling raw meat for humans also apply to raw meat for animals. Meat from processing plants is exposed to fecal contamination, salmonella, and e. coli. Feeding processed raw meat to your pet poses more dangers than benefits in most cases, and can be life-threatening.

What About Organic Diets?

Although organic diets do contain high-quality ingredients that are free of hormones, pesticides, etc., they contain high levels of phosphorus and magnesium that can lead to the formation of struvite crystals. Urinary crystals are far more threatening to your cat's health than non-organic ingredients.

How Do I Switch My Cat To A Different Food?

The best way to transition your cat to a new diet is to make the change slowly and gradually over a period of 2-3 weeks. (It may take longer depending on your cat.)

- Week 1, mix 75% of the previous food with 25% of the new food.
- Week 2, mix the foods 50-50.
- Week 3, increase the amount of the new food to 75%.

By Week 4, you can feed 100% of the new diet. This gradual change allows your cat to become accustomed to the new food without any stomach upset. It also gives them time to adapt to the shape, scent, texture and flavor of the new food.

My Cat Won't Eat the Good Food!

Some cats, especially finicky eaters, may be reluctant to change. In human terms, you are switching them from fast food to a nutritious balanced diet and like some humans, they may resist. You can try different flavors to determine which ones appeal to your cat. Cats are not like dogs or people-they will not eventually eat if they get hungry. In fact, the opposite is true-cats would rather starve than eat an unacceptable meal. So, if they will not eat for 24 hours, offer something you know they like and call us for advice.

The Bottom Line

Other brands of cat food may seem less expensive at first, but they cost you more in the long run in terms of the additional food needed, the extra waste you'll have to scoop, and the potential medical and behavioral problems they can cause.

We feed our pets Science Diet; what does that tell you?

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