

What food should I feed my Pet?

Answers to frequently asked questions about your pet's food.

There are so many foods on the market. How do I know which one is right for my new pet?

As with people, proper nutrition is a very important part of your pet's life. It is difficult to have a healthy pet if the food they are eating is not high quality. The saying, "you get what you pay for" is generally correct. While some pets have done fine on low quality foods, their lack of complete nutrition can take a toll on an animal's body. Many pets have costly medical bills which could have been avoided had they been on higher quality food. Outwardly, you may see a dull, dry coat and an overabundance of fecal material (this is caused by excessive "fillers" that the body can't digest); internally, we can see organ and urinary problems. Low quality food negatively affects the pH of the urine and can possibly cause stones, crystals, or ash build-up and can lead to infections or behavior problems. In male cats especially, the urethra can become blocked and if not "unplugged", the bladder can rupture, causing sudden death. To avoid these problems, we at Heartland recommend feeding foods like Science Diet, Eukanuba, Royal Canin, Purina, Iams, or other high-quality foods because these companies are monitored closely for quality control and they put out very good products.

How do I go about switching my pet's food?

A sudden change of food can sometimes cause our pets some problems—mainly diarrhea. To avoid this, we recommend taking about a week to slowly switch your pet over. Mix the old and new foods together, approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ old and $\frac{1}{4}$ new for a few days, over the course of a week, slowly mix in more of the new food until they are completely on the new diet.

How many times a day should I feed my pet?

This depends on the size and kind of pet you have. Before 4 months old, most puppies and kittens should be fed 2-3 times a day (some exceptions are tiny breeds that many need small amounts every few hours). Once they reach 6 months of age, you can reduce feedings to 1-2 times per day. We do not recommend leaving food out "free-choice" because of the tendency to overeat. If your pet has not eaten food in the bowl after 20 minutes, pick it up and give it at the next scheduled feeding. This will help with potty training also.

How much food should I feed my pet?

As with people, obesity is an issue in our pets, but extra weight (and the problems that stem from it) can be avoided. First, you want to feed a puppy or kitten food until your pet is about a year old. After that you can switch to an adult formula. Next, pick a food that is appropriate for your dog's size; for puppies that will over 60 pounds, we recommend a large breed puppy food, while a puppy that will only be 10 pounds will probably need a small dog formula. Look at the back of the food bag for a guideline on how much to start feeding, then cut back on that some (the back of the bag generally overstates how much a pet needs). Incidentally, you will need to feed smaller amounts of a high-quality food because there are less "fillers" and more good ingredients that your pet's body can use.

How do I know if my pet is starting to get overweight?

There are several indicators to watch for. 1.) You should be able to feel the ribs under a slight layer of fat—if you have to press really hard, or can't feel them, then your pet is probably too heavy. 2.) When looking down at your pet, they should have a waist, not look like a barrel! 3.) For dogs (after about 3-4 months of age) there should be a slope from the chest up to the belly. Kittens should not have a “jungle pouch” (the fat pad on the belly). Regularly assess the weight of your puppy or kitten to ensure that they are being fed the proper amount. Remember to increase the food with babies that are going through growth spurts! If you have any concerns about weight, please feel free to bring your pet in to be weighed or call us with any questions about your pet's nutrition!