

# Dr. Kim's feline mews



Phone: 0400 756 331

## What should I feed my cat?

Food has always fascinated our feline friends. And their furst and best choice comes neatly packaged – as a mouse! Catching mice certainly has numerous health benefits, but it also exposes your cat companion to dangers. A wholesome diet for your cat means careful swapping from 'natural' to 'nutritous'. Dr kim believes the improved longevity of cats in the 21st century can largely be ascribed to improved nutrition as well as better geriatric medicine, plus keeping kittens safe from harm (as they are the major trauma patients). Three things (almost) totally under your control. Let's start with food!

It is actually easier to make recommendations for cats with medical problems – the choices are pretty clear, and the real skill comes in PURR-suading the cat to eat the correct diet – many times the healthy cat in the household is the one who wants to eat the renal diet!

How can you decide on the best food for your cat There is only so much time you can spend researching all the material, and with all the marketing spin around the simple question of 'best food for my cat', the resulting confusion just shuts down rational discussion. That's where Dr Kim can help – and your next job is to get your cat to eat it!

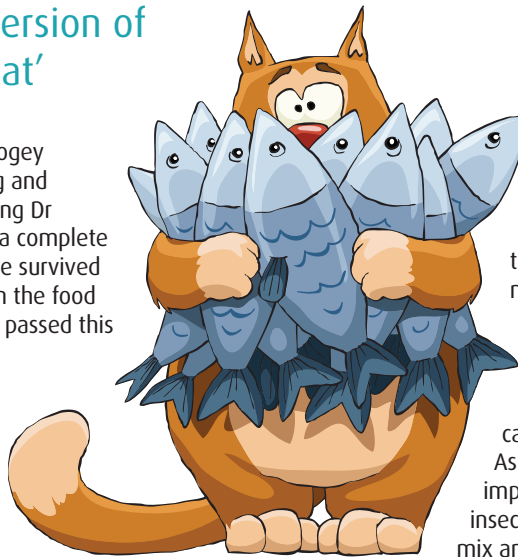
### Here is Dr Kim's potted version of 'What should I feed my cat'

**Dry kibble** This has become a bit of a bogey lately. In reality, many cats have lived long and healthy lives on dried kibble along (including Dr Kim's own cats In order to be classified as a complete diet, three generations of cats have to have survived on that food alone. Look at the labelling on the food you are buying to find out if the brand has passed this test.

If you are interested, there are books about 'Pottinger's Cats' which analysed the problem of processed food. Turned out the cat's lacked taurine mainly, but the process of discovery is fascinating. So – select high quality (meaning high digestibility) dried food - if you can afford it - either "premium" or "super premium" and a 'dry matter protein level' of 30% or more Check that it is age specific (either kitten, adult or senior) and have it as the cat's main source of food. Different breeds of cats 'grow up' and 'grow old' at different ages, but as a general rule, most felines are through the 'rapid growth phase' of kittenhood by 10 months old (later for the 'big breeds'), and start to become 'senior around 12 years old (though manufacturers would have you believe it is 8 years old). Dr Kim tends to define senior based on kidney function tests.

Most premium or super premium range foods are formulated to be a complete food, and have the appropriate levels of protein vs fat and vitamins and minerals for their stage of development.

Avoid coloured kibble as it is an indicATIOn that the flavours as well as the colours are sprayed on for our benefit rather than the cat's – and when they vomit the red colouring it stains your carpet. Imagine what it can do to your cat's intestines.

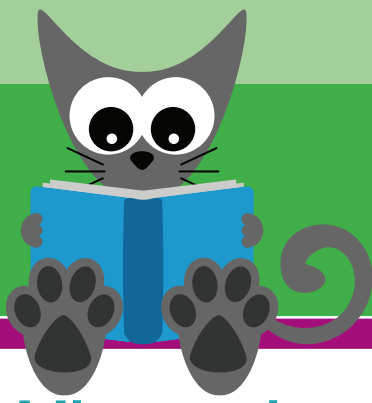


Supermarket brands are, in fact, OK for 70% of cats – especially those who can hunt or who have other sources of food but as their protein quality is much lower and they are much less digestible, there are problems for about 30% of cats and yours might be one of those. If beef (or non-specified meat) is one of the first in the list ingredients, be aware many cats are allergic to beef these days! Grain free is not necessarily the way to go either as they often have beef in them, and remember that the cats who are old today grew up on grain-style dried. As a unifying concept - high grade food is especially important for indoor cats (who can't supplement with insects and mice) and many of the purebreds. It is OK to mix and match 'normal food' but prescription diets can't be mixed around.

**Tinned food** is 80% water, so it's a much lower nutritional content than dried but much tastier to most cats (and yes, they are made that way). Think of it as McDonald's (or Purrger King!) for cats! So if your cat gets a taste for tinned food and refuse to eat anything else or will only eat one type, you may need to be clever and blend in other types to get the balance. The New Zealand 'Ziwipeak' tinned brand is the only one Dr Kim has found that maggots will eat, and as maggots are surprisingly fussy (they won't eat McDonald's beef burgers for example), that probably means it has fewer repellents and preservatives.. If you want to feed wet food, monitor any vomiting, as some cats are allergic to the gelling agents. The only benefit, according to some sources, is that it is hard to feed a cat enough wet food to get fat. 'The experts' say cats are 'habit feeders' and will eat the same thing every day.

Well, Dr Kim reckons they haven't met the majority of cats!

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## What should I feed my cat? continued...

\* ZiwiPeak dried is a New Zealand product and is close to ideal for cats. However, the product has an odd texture, and is most successfully used if fed to younger cats. Some older cats will adapt, but most cat's preferences are pretty set by 6 months old.

**Real meat!** For kittens, a teaspoon of raw, human-grade meat (Kangaroo is excellent), or a raw chicken wing or neck is a great addition to their dried food to help clean their teeth, provide fresh nutrients and exercise their hidden killer tiger instincts. They will generally love it, until about 6 months old, when they may get bored and not bother with chewing on bones (they know there will be other food somewhere!). At 10 months old kittens can have more meat to chew in their diets (the bigger breeds have to wait till 15 – 18 months old) as their calcium requirements for growth have stabilised. As adults you can start to supplement some of their dry food with meat or meaty bones (as mentioned above), and for seniors, cooked chicken and fresh meat is always a great way to keep some padding on those

old bones! Dr Kim can understand the thinking behind the 'raw meaty bones' and BARF (Biologically Appropriate Raw Food) concepts, [www.barfaustralia.com](http://www.barfaustralia.com), but finds the actual practice of it messier and more difficult than most cat owners want to put up with (herself included) and so far there is no proof of extra longevity. Some meat, with the well-researched processed foods as a base works fine for 95% of cats. The rest need special consideration anyway and can usually be classified as needing a 'medical' or 'prescription diet'. Interestingly, cats can be vegans, but the diet has to be carefully calculated and constructed or medical problems will soon appear. [www.veganpet.com.au/articles](http://www.veganpet.com.au/articles) for information and supply.

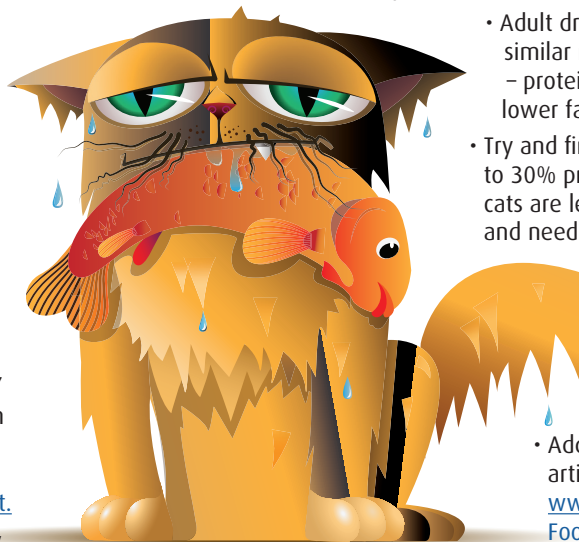
**Healthy treats!** If using treats as a reward, use pieces of their dried food, to avoid the fussiness problem mentioned above or even the chubbiness problem of hyper-palatable food. Cooked pieces of chicken or tiny pieces of cheese can be an extra special treat! Some of the dried liver treats and meats are high quality tempters.

**The marketing spin?** It is true that many processed foods are hyper-palatable. That means 30 – 40% of cats need their intake managed. Sigh. Just like their owners, some cats just want to eat more than they need. However, that is certainly not every cat, and 'how MUCH should I feed my cat' becomes the next question. Young cats can eat as much 'balanced' food as they want – the more they eat the faster they run. Indoor cats, particularly males, are going to need their intake restricted by about 2 years old – maintaining a Body Condition Score of 5 – 6 of 9 [www.purinaveterinarydiets.com/media/1209/body\\_condition\\_chart.pdf](http://www.purinaveterinarydiets.com/media/1209/body_condition_chart.pdf) and need a high protein diet (many metabolise carbs straight to fat..)

Dr Kim reckons the size 5 is too harsh for any cats not hunting for their main meals themselves – a bit like marathon runners, hunting cats keep themselves very slim PURRhaps because they enjoy the exercise more than the food.

### What to look for on the label;

- A specific protein source (eg chicken not chicken by-products) as the first item in the "ingredients" list
- The smaller the ingredients list, with more items you can pronounce, the better
- The "Guaranteed Analysis" Or "Composition" on kitten food should ideally have more than a trace of omega-3's such as "DHA"
- On all cat food, either in the analysis or in the ingredients list, there should be added taurine, vitamins and minerals
- High quality kitten dry food should be between 30% to 40% protein and 20% fat
  - Adult dry food ideally should be between similar margins to the kitten food for protein – protein is expensive, and lower protein and lower fat usually means more carbs
  - Try and find senior dry food with between 20% to 30% protein and 15% to 20% fat as older cats are less efficient at processing their food and need more condensed calories
  - Ideally stick to foods that are sourced and made within Australia.



### What to avoid;

- Added salt, sugar, Propylene Glycol, and artificial colours  
[www.madehow.com/Volume-2/Pet-Food.html](http://www.madehow.com/Volume-2/Pet-Food.html)
- Grain products or cereals / soy as the first ingredient – Generally grain products are fine for your cat in dry food, as long as it doesn't have an allergy. But when the food is predominantly made of grains, with little traces of meat products, that's not offering highly digestible nutrients for your cat
- Chemical preservatives (look for Vitamin C or E, rosemary and so forth instead)
- Be careful if beef, whey (casein) or tuna are the main source of protein – many cats develop allergies to beef and tuna products these days, try and go for more uncommon protein sources such as turkey, venison or lamb. Chicken and turkey are fine usually, but some cats do become allergic.

**Bottom line:** cats these days are pretty adaptable consumers – so unless yours is a 'posh pussycat' with specific nutritional needs – just feed the best you can afford. And monitor the effects!