

## Feeding

### *There are lots of choices of cat foods. What should I feed my kitten?*

Diet is extremely important in the growing months of a cat's life, and there are two important criteria that should be met in selecting food for your kitten. We recommend a NAME-BRAND FOOD made by a national cat food company (not a generic or local brand), and a form of food made for kittens. This food can be free fed until your kitten is 6 - 12 months of age. We recommend that you only buy food that has the AAFCO certification. Usually, you can find this information very easily on the label. AAFCO is an organization that oversees the entire pet food industry. It does not endorse any particular food, but it will certify that the food has met the minimum requirements for nutrition. Most of the commercial pet foods will have the AAFCO label. Generic brands often do not have it.

Feeding a dry, canned, or semi-moist form of cat food is acceptable. Each has advantages and disadvantages. Dry food is definitely the most inexpensive and can be left in the cat's bowl without drying. Crunching the kibble also helps to remove some of the plaque build-up on the teeth. If given the choice, the average cat will eat a mouthful of food about 12-20 times per day. The good brands of dry food are just as nutritious as the other forms. As a rule, most veterinarians will recommend dry food for your kitten. Semi-moist and canned foods are also acceptable. However, both are considerably more expensive than dry food. They often are more appealing to the cat's taste; however, they are not more nutritious. If you feed a very tasty food, you are running the risk of creating a cat with a finicky appetite. In addition, the semi-moist foods are high in sugar and will allow tartar to accumulate more quickly.

TABLE FOODS ARE NOT RECOMMENDED, and because they are generally very tasty, cats will often begin to hold out for these and not eat their well-balanced cat food. If you choose to give your kitten table food, be sure that at least 90% of its diet is good quality commercial kitten food. We enjoy a variety of things to eat in our diet. However, most cats actually prefer not to change from one food to another unless they are trained to do so by the way you feed them. Do not feel guilty if your cat is happy to just eat one food day after day, week after week.

Commercials for cat food can be very misleading. If you watch carefully you will notice that commercials promote cat food on one basis: taste. Nutrition is rarely mentioned. Most of the "gourmet" foods are marketed to appeal to owners who want the best for their cats; however, they do not offer the cat any nutritional advantage over a good quality dry food, and they are far more expensive. If your cat eats a gourmet food very long, it will probably not be happy with other foods. If it needs a special diet due to a health problem later in life, it is very unlikely to accept it. Therefore, we do not encourage feeding gourmet cat foods.