

Wet Cat Food vs. Dry Cat Food



When it comes to buying cat food, the options can feel overwhelming. Wet cat food or dry? Chicken or fish? It feels like an endless multiple choice test and it's hard to know how to make the best choice for your cat.

Start with the basics. There are two basic kinds of cat food: wet and dry. Both contain similar ingredients but undergo different processing to get to their finished form.

What you need to know about wet cat food

Wet cat food, also known as canned food, has a higher moisture content than kibble or dry food. You can see the differences by comparing the labels: Dry foods typically contain around 10 percent moisture while the moisture content in wet cat foods can be more than 80 percent.

Your cat should always have access to clean, fresh water to help her stay hydrated but the higher moisture content in wet food can help, too. Hydration is essential for processes like digestion, temperature regulation and joint lubrication. If your cat becomes dehydrated, she may exhibit symptoms like weakness, poor appetite and lethargy.

The extra water content in wet food could be especially important if your cat has urinary tract infections, kidney disease or urinary crystals and could benefit from increased water intake. Your vet can advise you if a wet food diet could help a cat with a health condition.

Studies have also found that the high moisture content in wet food can also help cats feel full, helping them to eat less and lose weight, which is especially important for cats that are overweight or obese.

Wet cat food is also lower in carbohydrates. Cats are carnivores and struggle to digest carbohydrates. Not only are ingredients like oats, rice, wheat and corn harder for cats to digest, **research** shows that high-carb foods may also increase the risk of feline obesity or diabetes.

Some cats, including **kittens** who are too young for permanent teeth and older cats who may be missing teeth, may also find wet food easier to chew.

One of the biggest reasons cat owners choose wet food is because their cats seem to prefer the taste. Wet food has a stronger odor (and perhaps a stronger taste) and a different texture than dry kibble that often sends cats running for their

Researchers tested the appeal of wet cat food at different temperatures and **found** that cats preferred their wet food when it was heated to 98 degrees Fahrenheit (their second preference was for wet cat food served at room temperature or 70 degrees Fahrenheit).

What you need to know about dry cat food

The advantages of dry cat food cannot be overlooked.

Dry food can be less expensive than wet food, which is a significant reason cat owners choose to feed their cats kibble. It's also more shelf stable. You'll find the expiration or "use by" date on the bag to know how long dry cat food will stay fresh.

Unlike wet cat food, which needs to be eaten (or refrigerated) as soon as it's opened, dry cat food can be left out for longer periods.

Feeding dry cat food allows you to fill your cat's dish in the morning and let her graze all day; some experts believe allows your cat to honor their natural instinct of eating several small meals throughout the day.

Remember: Portions matter. Dry cat food is high in carbohydrates, which contain a lot of calories and all-day grazing could lead your cat to overeat. Look for the recommended serving size on the bag and only dish out the amount your cat should be eating in a day based on her weight.

Kibble can also help cats maintain good oral health. Several **studies** have shown that cats fed dry food diets had better oral health because the kibble was coarse and helped remove plaque from their teeth and prevented periodontal disease.

Choosing dry foods with a "cross" shape instead of a round shape could also help reduce dental disease. **Researchers** found that it forces pets to spend more time chewing, which further reduces plaque. There are even veterinary diets for cats with dental disease that are available with a prescription; talk to your vet to see if that's the best food for your cat.

Dry cat food is lower in protein than wet food and protein is an essential nutrient for cats. If you choose to feed your cat kibble, check the nutrition labels, also called guaranteed analysis, on the bag and look for brands with the highest protein values.

Kibble is also more energy dense than wet cat food, which means it contains more calories in the same volume of food. While this can be a drawback for cats who are overweight or obese, it's a benefit to cats who are picky eaters, have appetite loss, or medical conditions that cause weight because it allows them to get more calories from less food.

How to choose

When it comes to choosing between wet and dry cat foods, there is no perfect choice. It may even take some trial and error to discover which type of food (and which flavors) your cat likes best.

Wet cat food and dry cat food each have their own advantages and disadvantages and it's up to pet parents—in consultation with a veterinarian—to decide which to choose.

Many cat parents choose a combination of wet and dry food; there are even **wet food toppers** that were made to be added on top of kibble. Toppers, like **wet cat food**, add moisture content, flavor and odors that can make dry food more appetizing. They are often packaged in smaller tins or resealable pouches so you can add small amounts to each meal.

There are a few important things to remember when it comes to shopping for **cat food**. It's important to select a wet or dry cat food that was formulated for your **cat's age and life stage**: Kittens need different foods than adult cats; select a food that's inappropriate for your cat and she may not get the nutrients she needs.

Regardless of which type of food you choose, make sure it has the AAFCO label. Foods with the Association of American Feed Control Officials seal on the packaging meet strict guidelines for nutrient contents and ensure that you're feeding complete and balanced diet that your four-legged friend needs to thrive.