

## WHAT DO YOU FEED YOUR MATURE CAT OR DOG? (Diet recommendations for a healthy senior pet!)

When it comes to choosing the right food for your pet, there are countless options available both over-the-counter and through your regular veterinary clinic. To keep your pet healthy as he or she ages, **consider changing from a maintenance diet to a mature or senior diet with nutrient profiles that match your pet's changing needs.** Your pet has a less rambunctious lifestyle these days and might need a little extra help to keep vital organs from working too hard.

When considering a new diet for your pet, look for a manufacturer, like Purina, Hill's Science Diet, Royal Canin and BLUE, that carries a variety of foods formulated for mature and senior pets. They should also **follow appropriate quality controls and guidelines set by AAFCO to assure a complete and balanced diet for your pet's lifestage.** Look for the **AAFCO statement** on the pet food bag or can to find a diet that is appropriate for your mature pet. If you have any questions about comparing diets, don't hesitate to ask your veterinarian.



Aside from an appropriate diet, **always keep fresh, clean water sources available for your pet. Staying hydrated is vital for overall health as well as maintaining their goal weight.**

### HOW IS A SENIOR DIET DIFFERENT?

#### PROTEIN

Once pets are done growing and have matured, their protein needs change. They no longer need protein for growth, but rather for maintenance of muscle mass. **By keeping an appropriate amount of protein in your pet's diet, the protein quality is optimized in terms of digestibility and use by the body.** In certain cases, such as during chronic kidney disease, protein levels should be lowered to lessen the amount of work the kidneys have to do for elimination, but not entirely restricted as is sometimes suggested.

#### FAT

The fat, or calorie content, of mature pet diets is often decreased compared with typical adult diets. Calorie content is lowered since daily activities are generally limited for mature pets, who also have an overall decrease in their metabolism. **By feeding senior pets less calories, it helps them maintain a healthy body weight.** This ultimately lowers your pet's risk of side-effects associated with obesity, like arthritis, shorter lifespan and systemic illnesses.

#### VITAMINS AND MINERALS

Mature pet diets often reduce the amount of sodium and phosphorus to lower the risk of high blood pressure and the development of kidney disease. Antioxidants are increased in senior diets to help protect cells from damage. They also support brain function. Fatty acids are also increased to help reduce inflammation.

### WHEN IS MY PET CONSIDERED A SENIOR?

**Dogs:** 6+ years old

**Cats:** 7+ years old



### KEEP TREATS TO A MINIMUM!

As pets age, they have fewer caloric requirements. Treats, table scraps and other snacks provide unnecessary calories that can cause unintentional weight gain and make conditions like arthritis worse.

# IS MY PET EATING THE RIGHT AMOUNT?

Calculating your pet's daily caloric needs is necessary to ensure the amount of food and treats being fed will give your pet all the nutrients needed, without exceeding his or her calorie requirements. Once your veterinarian calculates your pet's caloric needs, he or she will determine the exact amount of food your pet needs to eat each day and split the amount into a reasonable feeding schedule. **You should measure each meal in grams with a scale to stay on track.**

## BODY CONDITION SCORE

A body condition score (BCS) and muscle mass evaluation should be assessed at each visit to your pet's veterinarian. If either body weight or muscle mass is not in the ideal range, please ask for a detailed dietary plan to address the issues.

## OBESITY

If your pet is overweight, it is vital to measure the amount of food and treats consumed each day rather than allowing your pet to free-feed, which can lead to over eating and excess calorie consumption.

## UNDERWEIGHT

If your pet needs to gain weight, measuring the amount of food per meal can help you determine if or how much your pet is eating each day. It will also help you maintain their goal weight, once attained, rather than unintentionally allowing your pet to continue to gain weight.



# WHICH MEDICAL CONDITIONS NEED A TAILORED DIET?

Some diseases are unfortunately more likely to occur as our pets age, including

- kidney disease
- changes in thyroid function
- liver disease
- diabetes
- other metabolic-related conditions

Seeking a personalized dietary plan from your veterinarian or consulting a Board-Certified Veterinary Nutritionist™ is the best way to provide complete and balanced nutrition to your pet, especially during periods of illness and chronic disease.



## CHANGING DIETS

Changing your pet's diet can upset their stomach. Take the time to gradually switch your pet to a new mature diet over the course of a week. Every couple of days, mix 25 percent more of the new pet food into your pet's old pet food.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**The American College of Veterinary Nutrition:**

<http://www.acvn.org/nutrition-resources>

**The American Veterinary Medical Foundation:**

<http://www.avma.org/public/PetCare/Pages/caring-for-an-older-pet-faq.aspx>