

# Food and fitness for a healthy cat



# Introduction

Just like people, pets need to eat the right diet and get enough exercise to stay fit and healthy. But as many of us know, it's not always easy!

In this handy guide, you'll find lots of information on feeding and exercise to help you keep your cat healthy and happy. And if your cat is carrying a few extra pounds, there's also advice on how you can help them lose weight and get back into shape.



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From the *PAW Report*  
Important facts from our latest  
*PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report*



# How do I know if my cat is a healthy shape?

## Why are we talking about shape?

A cat's shape is a better way to tell if they're carrying extra weight rather than relying on the scales alone. That's because the ideal weight is different for every type and breed – but a healthy shape is the same for all cats.

It's good to get into the habit of checking your cat's shape every few weeks, starting when they're a kitten. That way, you'll know what's normal for your cat – and they'll enjoy the extra attention!

## How to check for a healthy shape

All you have to do is 'look and feel'. We've included some pictures to help you.

When you've finished, give your cat a big hug – and please remember to wash your hands!

### Look

Look at your cat from the side, and from above. You should be able to see a waist; if not, your cat may be a bit overweight.

### Feel

Run your hands over your cat's side. The skin should move freely over the ribs, which ought to be easy to feel.

### Feel

Run your hands along your cat's back. You should be able to feel the spine and hipbones quite easily under the skin, but they shouldn't be sticking out.

### Feel

Feel under your cat's tummy. It should go in, not bulge out.

### Feel

Gently squeeze the base of your cat's tail where it joins the spine. There shouldn't be any build-up of fat.

## Why is your cat's shape important?

- A cat with a healthy shape is more likely to enjoy a long and happy life.
- Overweight cats get old before their time, and you'll have less fun with them.
- Being overweight can lead to other problems, including arthritis, diabetes and heart disease.
- Operations are more risky for cats that are overweight.

Your vet or vet nurse can show you how to check your cat's shape.

## BODY CONDITION SCORE

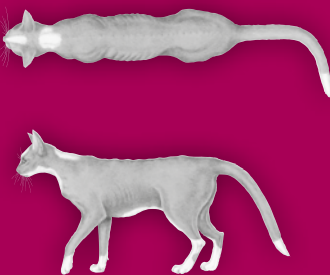
THE FIVE WELFARE NEEDS



1

### VERY THIN

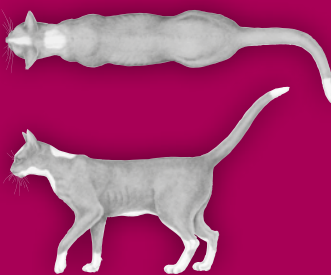
- Very little muscle
- Standing out ribs, backbone and hipbones
- No body fat



2

### UNDERWEIGHT

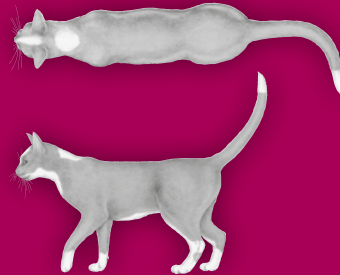
- A little fat over hipbones
- Can see ribs and backbone
- Marked obvious tucked-in waist



3

### IDEAL

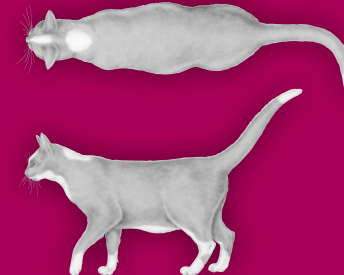
- Smooth tucked-in waist
- Can feel ribs, backbone and hips but not prominent
- Abdominal fat pad just visible



4

### OVERWEIGHT

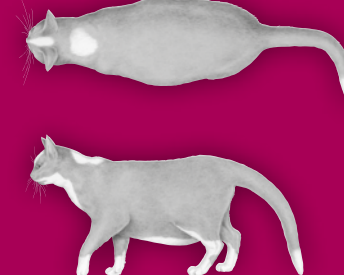
- No waist
- Ribs, backbone and hips difficult to feel
- Enlarged abdominal fat pad



5

### OBESE

- Round body
- Cannot feel ribs, backbone or hipbones
- Fat pad hanging under cat





# Diet

Your cat needs the right food to stay healthy and happy. The type and amount depends on their breed, species, age, health and lifestyle. Your cat needs fresh water to drink at all times.

## What should I feed my cat?

Cats must eat meat – they can't be vegetarians. This is because their bodies need certain proteins that are only found in meat. Without them, your cat could become very ill, and even go blind. Cats also need to eat animal fat to get vitamin A, which helps keep them healthy.

'Life-stage feeding' matches your cat's diet to what they need at different ages and stages of development. For example, kittens need different food from older cats, because their bodies are still growing. Many companies make food especially for kittens, juniors, adults and seniors.

Feeding your cat a complete commercial pet food is the easiest way to make sure they get all the nutrients they need.

- You'll find guidelines on how much to feed on the packet.
- You can check you're feeding the right amount by weighing the food out.

It sounds obvious, but pets that eat too much get fat! If you feed your cat a lot of treats as well as their normal food, most of the extra calories will turn into fat. Cats don't need treats to know you love them: playing and spending time with you are what they enjoy most of all.

## Should I give my cat milk to drink?

Our vets recommend that you don't give cats milk to drink. Cows' milk contains sugar that cats find hard to digest, which can cause tummy upsets.



## How often should I feed my cat?

Cats prefer lots of small meals to one large one. They 'graze', eating between 8 and 16 times a day! So, it's best just to leave food out for them, unless there's a chance it will go off, or be eaten by another cat.

It's a good idea to weigh out your cat's food at the start of the day. Most cats are very good at knowing how much they need to eat, but some are greedy! If your cat is eating too much and putting on weight, it may be better to feed them two meals a day, instead of leaving food out.

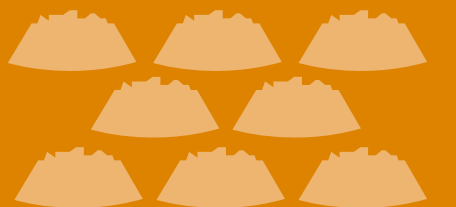
## What about food scraps?

Our vets advise owners not to feed leftovers, bits of meat and other scraps, because:

- Cats that are used to getting scraps may refuse to eat their normal food without them.
- It unbalances the cat's regular diet, and they often get overweight.
- Your cat may misbehave during your mealtimes, thinking they're going to get food, too!



**CATS EAT  
BETWEEN  
8 AND  
16  
TIMES A DAY!**





# Exercise

Pets rely on us to keep them fit and healthy. Cats are designed to be active in short bursts, so playing with them is the best way to make sure they get enough exercise, especially if they live indoors.

It's also a great way to bond with them, and show them how much you love them!



## Special cat toys and activities will help to keep your cat busy and interested in life.

This is important because cats that are bored tend to eat too much and get fat. Remember to keep your cat's toys clean, and throw them away if they get damaged.

Getting them a new toy every now and again is a perfect treat, and much better for them than extra food.



## Most cats love playing games, especially with:

- Things they can hit. Cats enjoy batting at light things that move easily across the floor: a ball of paper is ideal. It's important not to give them anything they can chew up or swallow.
- Things they can chase. Wind-up toys, or a piece of string dragged across the floor, will turn even a couch potato into a hunter!
- Things they can climb into. Cats can have hours of fun with an empty box.
- Things they can scratch. Scratching keeps a cat's claws sharp, and tones their shoulder and back muscles. A scratching-post will meet this need – and should save your furniture!

Although it's tempting, it's not a good idea to use your hand or fingers as 'bait'. Your cat will think it's OK to scratch and bite you – and it's not, even as a game!

It's important not to make big or sudden changes to your cat's diet or exercise routine. If you have any questions or concerns, your vet will be happy to help.



# From the PAW Report


Every year, we produce our *PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report* about how healthy and happy the UK's pets really are.

Our latest Report shows that too many people are still feeding their pets food that isn't good for them. More than 5.5 million pets are given things like crisps, cake, leftovers, cheese, chips and takeaways as part of their normal diet – and more than 2 million owners feed treats because their pets beg for them.

Not surprisingly, many vets tell us they now see many more overweight and obese pets – even though most owners know that obese pets have more health problems, and live shorter lives.

It's not all bad news, though. More owners are now feeding their pets based on body shape and weight than they were in 2011. This is really positive, but there's still a lot to do. We can deal with the obesity crisis facing the UK's pets: it just takes time and effort from their owners.



**80%** OF  
**VETERINARY PROFESSIONALS**   
**BELIEVE**  
**THERE WILL BE**  
**MORE**  
**OVERWEIGHT PETS**  
**THAN**  
**HEALTHY WEIGHT PETS**  
**IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS**

+++ **OVER** +++  
**5.5 MILLION**  
**PETS GET TREATS**  
**AS PART OF THEIR**  
**DAILY DIET INCLUDING:**

  
**CRISPS**

  
**CAKE**

  
**LEFTOVERS OF HUMAN FOOD**

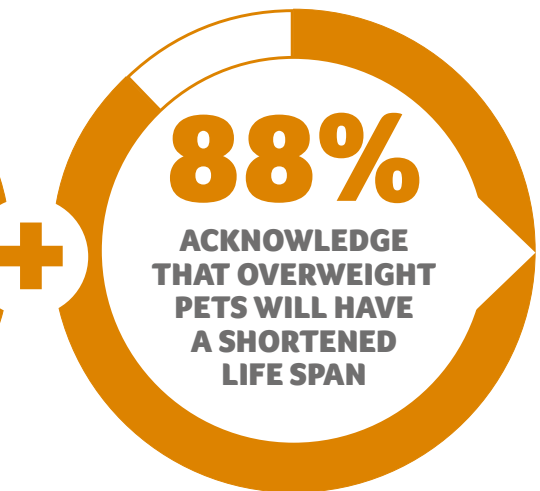
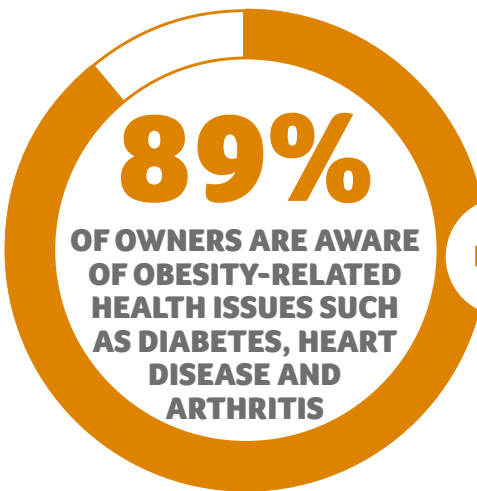
  
**CHEESE**

  
**CHIPS**

  
**TAKEAWAYS**

The main sources of information used when deciding how much to feed their cat:

Common sense	<b>27%</b>
Past experience	<b>21%</b>
Veterinary professionals	<b>14%</b>



**YET ...**  
THE UK IS STILL IN THE GRIP OF A PET OBESITY CRISIS



Learn more about the health of pets in the UK today by reading our *PAW Report*:  
[pdsa.org.uk/PAWreport](https://pdsa.org.uk/PAWreport)

# PDSA is the UK's leading veterinary charity

In our 51 Pet Hospitals UK-wide, we have more than **300 vets** and **600 nursing staff**, who carry out **2.7 million treatments** on more than **470,000 sick and injured pets** each year.

We care for pets whose owners are in real need, and can't afford vets' fees: we also help and advise owners on everyday care for their pets.

Treating our pet patients costs us more than £60 million a year, with every penny coming from donations.

For more information on the charity and its work:

Email [info@pdsa.org.uk](mailto:info@pdsa.org.uk)

Phone **0800 917 2509**

[pdsa.org.uk](http://pdsa.org.uk)

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