

why buy premium cat food?

basic feline care

As you shop for cat foods, the wide range of foods available often astounds you. You may notice some brands are labeled “premium.” What does this mean, how does premium food affect your cat’s health and how do you choose the right premium food for your cat?

What is premium?

Sources and availability of nutrients are key in choosing your cat’s food. Cat food varies in the quality of ingredients, formula and the nutritional value in the food. Premium cat food typically has higher standards in each of these important variables.

How is premium better for my cat?

Premium cat food is generally more densely packed with nutrients than economy brands. Better ingredients can contribute to better digestibility and the overall health of your cat. Your cat will eat as much or as little as they need to get sufficient nutrients. Smaller servings will be easier to digest, and they will be less likely to put on extra weight. Premium brands are also more consistent between bags.

Your cat’s nutritional needs are based on age, activity level, temperament, environment and physical makeup. Premium cat food typically has higher quality protein sources, no artificial dyes and added antioxidants and vitamins. If you’re unsure about what to feed your pet, contact your veterinarian.

What to look for in cat food:

In general, you should provide your cat these four basic nutritional needs:

- Protein from a meat, fish or poultry source
- Obligate taurine, an essential amino acid



Developed with and approved by a qualified veterinarian.

- ❑ Certain other vitamins, minerals, enzymes and fatty acids
- ❑ Water

Cats are obligate carnivores and need meat in their diet to maintain their health. Corn, wheat and rice are often used as fillers, even though cats need very few carbohydrates in their diet. Economy brands typically use more carbohydrate filler in their products, resulting in cats eating much more than they would if given higher quality foods. The continued feeding of low-quality food over a period of years will contribute to or even cause serious medical conditions that may require expensive veterinary or side care.

Carefully examine the ingredient list on the back or side of the bag. Protein can come from a variety of sources, including plant matter, so you need to make sure the bulk of the protein is derived from meat and poultry products. The list of ingredients is written based on each ingredient's percentage in the food, from highest to lowest. It is best to look for diets with meat products making up at least three or four of the first six listed ingredients.

High-quality protein sources:

Protein should include high-quality meat.

Preservatives:

Chemical preservatives such as BHA, BHT and ethoxyquin are often added to pet food. Natural preservatives such as vitamin C, vitamin E and oils of rosemary, clove or other spices are a better alternative. Natural preservatives do not provide as long of a shelf life but are generally safer.

By-products:

By-products can vary from batch to batch. They can contain internal parts of animals such as necks, heads, feet, intestines and other internal organs. Many manufacturers use by-products because they're less expensive, but these may not be the best source of food for your pet.

Antioxidants:

Antioxidants are often added to cat food to supplement and help a cat's immune system. Antioxidants can help deter many diseases, including kidney disease, heart disease and cancer.

Artificial dyes:

Artificial dyes are often used in pet food for visual purposes, but they are not necessary, and some have been linked to medical problems.

How to read labels:

Labels differ from brand to brand and can sometimes be quite challenging to understand. On the plus side, there are special labeling requirements for pet food regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and many manufacturers adopt the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) standards.

AAFCO's four rules for product names:

95% rule (Example: Chicken for Cats, Chicken 'n Liver Cat Food) 95% of the product must be the named ingredient (of animal origin), not counting the water added for processing. If more than one item is named, then the combination must total 95%, and the first named ingredient must have a higher quantity than the second. Counting the added water, the named ingredient still must comprise 70% of the product.

25% or "Dinner" rule (Example: Chicken Dinner for Cats, Chicken Formula Cat Food) 25% of the product must contain the named ingredient, not counting the water added for processing. "Platter," "entrée," "nuggets" and "formula" are also used within this rule. If more than one ingredient is named, then at least 3% of each ingredient must be added.

3% or "With" rule (Example: Cat Food with Chicken) At least 3% of the product must contain the named ingredient. This label can be easily confused with the 95% rule label. "Chicken Cat Food" will contain at least 95% chicken, while "Cat Food with Chicken" will possibly contain only 3% chicken.

“Flavor” rule (Example: Turkey-flavored Cat Food) A specific percentage is not required under this rule. But the product must contain an amount sufficient to be detected (using animals trained to prefer specific flavors to verify). The flavor may or may not be the named ingredient; instead, it could be a substance that will give the characterizing flavor of the ingredient.

A good way to verify the product names is to read the ingredients list. All ingredients are required to be listed in order of predominance by weight. Ingredients that are on the labels should appear in the ingredients list accordingly to the rule applied.

What labels don’t reveal:

“Plump chickens, tender turkey, fresh grains and wholesome nutritious meals for your cat.” Through media and advertising, these are the images the pet food manufacturers want consumers to believe when they purchase their products. But not all manufacturers are the same.

Manufacturers have different standards regarding the freshness of ingredients they use to make pet food. Some manufacturers may cut costs by using the cheapest ingredients available at the time food is made. Since costs rise and fall, the manufacturers vary the ingredients from batch to batch, resulting in different nutritional value.

You cannot determine the freshness or quality of an ingredient by reading the label; instead you must trust the pet food manufacturer to use quality ingredients and produce food that is best for your pet. Start by choosing brands that put their company reputation on the line for the products they sell as well as food that is recommended by your veterinarian.

Note: The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for veterinary care. If you need additional information, please contact your veterinarian.