

# Why Buy Premium Cat Food?

Basic Feline Care



## CARE SHEET

Developed with and approved by a Qualified Veterinarian

As you shop for cat food, the wide range of foods available often astounds you. You 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 is key in the choosing your cat’s food. Cat foods vary in the quality of ingredients, formula and the nutritional value in the food. Premium cat foods typically have 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 and calories than economy brands. Better ingredients means better digestibility and contributes more to the health of your cat. Your cat will eat as much or as little as he/she needs to get sufficient nutrients. Smaller servings will be easier to digest and they will less likely 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 foods typically have 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 provide for your cats these four basic nutritional needs:

#### Cats' Basic Nutritional Needs:

- Protein from a meat, fish, or poultry source
- Taurine, an essential amino acid
- Certain other vitamins, minerals, enzymes, and fatty acids
- Water

Cats are 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 little 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 foods over a period of years will contribute to, or even cause serious medical conditions that may require expensive veterinary care.

Carefully examine the ingredient list on the back 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 based on their percentages in the food, from greatest to least. It is best to look for diets with meat products making up at least 3 or 4 of the first 6 listed ingredients.

**High Quality Protein Sources:** High quality protein sources should include protein from meat sources.

**Preservatives:** Chemical preservatives such as BHA, BHT and ethoxyquin are often added in pet foods. 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 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 it’s less expensive, 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 foods for visual purposes, but it is not necessary and some have been linked to medical problems.

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### 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 FDA (Food and Drug Administration) and many manufacturers adopt AFFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials) standards.

#### **AFFCO Product Name 4 Rules:**

##### **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%, with the first named ingredient of 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 are 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 ingredient must be used in the product. 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 flavored to verify). The ingredient may or may not be the ingredient named, instead it could be a substance that will give the characterizing flavor of the ingredient.

A good way to verify the product names is reading the ingredient list. All ingredients are required to be listed in order of predominance by weight. Ingredients that are in the labels should appear in the ingredient 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 wants consumers to believe they are purchasing in their products. But not all manufacturers are the same.

Manufacturers have differing 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 and ones that are recommended by your veterinarian.

**Note:** The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for veterinary care. If you need additional information, please refer to the above sources or contact your veterinarian as appropriate.