

PART 2
FOOD SERIES

Wet or dry?



Food expert Nicole Paley discusses the advantages of both and highlights why feeding a mixed diet could suit your cat.

OUR EXPERT



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While some cat owners swear by wet food, others insist that dry is the best, but both sides have benefits and if feeding a 'complete' diet, they'll both deliver all the nutrients your cat needs in his daily diet.

THE BENEFITS OF DRY CAT FOOD

Dry complete diets have some specific plus points — they are convenient, easy to measure and use, easier to store, and have a longer shelf-life once opened than wet foods. Some may also help to remove plaque from the teeth.

If you choose a dry food, you can expect your cat to chew it more actively and take longer to eat, to drink more water and to return regularly

to the food rather than eating it all at once.

Bear in mind that cats at certain life stages may prefer softer foods, for instance elderly cats or weaning kittens. Wet food will work well on these occasions and there are also some dry diets which have been specially designed to be soaked.

THE BENEFITS OF WET CAT FOOD

Some cats simply prefer wet food's aroma and texture, and it can still be very convenient with single-serve formats ensuring a fresh, easy-to-serve meal each time. Cats who eat wet food will eat more in one sitting rather than going back and forth, and will drink less as there is higher water content in wet food than in dry food.

The amount of water intake is particularly important for cats prone to constipation or the formation of urinary crystals/stones, or if they have diabetes or kidney disease — therefore feeding a wet food can be especially beneficial for cats with these conditions.

Serve wet food at room temperature to ensure your cat can taste and smell it properly. Warming up an opened can may take up to two hours

from being taken out of the fridge — alternatively, you might consider microwaving canned foods for a short time, but ensure a consistent temperature throughout and be careful of hot spots. In general, avoid serving food for your cat that is either too hot or too cold.

MIX IT UP!

When given a choice, many cats seem to prefer a mixture of both wet and dry foods compared to dry or wet only. Wet food is shown to increase enjoyment and add variety to a diet because of the wide selection of textures. On the other hand, dry food satisfies a cat's natural desire to eat many small meals throughout the day.

Many owners serve a mixture of dry and wet, as some cats prefer wet food in the morning and to have dry food left out during the day. While dog owners tend to feed wet food as a topping, cat owners tend to feed either wet or dry separately. However, there are no hard and fast rules — ultimately it is for each owner to decide what to feed their pet. However, if feeding a mix of wet and dry pet foods, be careful to feed only the

total amount of food that your pet needs so as to minimise any undesirable weight gain.

WATER IS A MUST

Whether your cat eats wet or dry food, it's imperative that your cat has access to clean, fresh drinking water at all times, preferably in a large ceramic bowl. Plenty of water is especially important if you are feeding dry food. If your cat is reluctant to drink, try a bigger bowl — some cats don't like it when their whiskers touch the sides — or a water fountain.

Metallic bowls can put a cat off drinking too as they see reflections and shadows when they put their head down to drink. Ideally, water should not be positioned directly next to food as cats prefer some separation between their various resources. If cats go outdoors, a bowl to collect rainwater may be more popular than the clear, fresh water indoors.

And remember, milk is not a substitute for water. Cats don't need milk after weaning and many are intolerant of lactose, which can cause diarrhoea. Even specially formulated 'cat milk' should be treated as a food, not a drink, with food intake adjusted accordingly. ■