

Feeding Nondomestic Cats

The most natural diet for cats is whole prey. Their bodies rely on nutrients from the entire prey animal—muscle meat, organs, skin, and bones—to maintain health. But a whole prey diet may not be practical to feed your cats every day.



WHAT TO FEED YOUR CATS TO KEEP THEM HEALTHY



One good approach is to feed a commercial diet designed for nondomestic cats and offer whole prey or bones regularly. This combination will give your cats the right balance of nutrients and takes the guesswork out of providing a balanced diet. Offering bones also helps to maintain dental health.

CAUTION! Homemade diets are challenging to create with the right balance of nutrients. Meat alone lacks the calcium, minerals, and vitamins needed for healthy bones and bodies.



DID YOU KNOW?

Healthy adult big cats (lions, tigers, leopards, jaguars, cougars) are commonly fasted and provided a large bone 1–2 days a week. It is less common to fast smaller or very active cats.

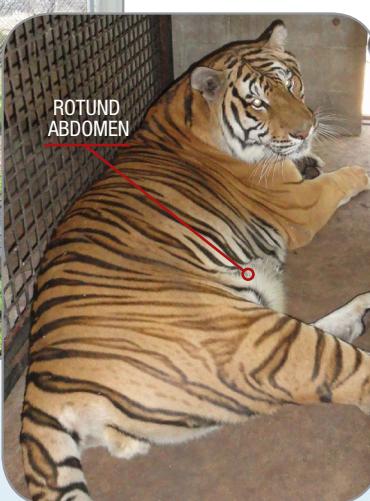
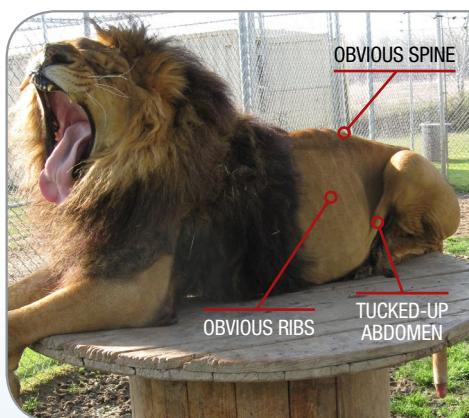
Fasting young, growing, underweight, or sick cats may slow their growth or hinder their ability to fight disease.



Daily Food Amounts

Daily food amounts will vary based on the size, age, health, activity level, and reproductive status of the cat as well as the fat or caloric content of the diet. Leaner diets may require feeding more food each day. Feed the cats an amount to maintain an optimal body condition.

Underfed cats may have a tucked-up abdomen with obvious ribs and/or spine. Overfed cats may have a rotund abdomen and are more likely to develop joint problems that impact mobility or pressure sores most frequently seen on the hips and elbows.



PRACTICAL TIP

To Ensure a Wholesome Diet:

- Promptly wrap and refrigerate or freeze fresh meat
- Thaw frozen food items in a refrigerator to help prevent contamination
- Feed proper portions so food is eaten before it begins to spoil
- Remove uneaten food from the cat's enclosure before it spoils



This Animal Care Aid is part of a series developed to provide information about non-domestic cat health and husbandry. Refer to the other topics covered in the series for more information on non-domestic cat care.

Questions? Email us at CenterforAnimalWelfare@usda.gov

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