

COMMERCE AND EMPLOYMENT DEPARTMENT

GUIDANCE FOR THE WELFARE OF PET CATS

MADE UNDER SECTION 13(6) OF THE ANIMAL WELFARE (GUERNSEY)
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GUIDANCE – FOOD AND WATER

Food

A nutritionally balanced diet will maintain a cat in good health and vigour and a good diet can also help to prevent the development of many diseases.

A cat is a true carnivore and it cannot be a vegetarian. It needs to eat certain proteins, vitamins and fatty acids that are only available from meat in order to thrive and survive. A cat also has a higher protein requirement than some other species, such as dogs.

The dietary requirements of a cat can usually be met by feeding a commercial pet food that has been specifically formulated for cats. Dietary requirements will **not** be met by:

- a) a vegetarian diet,
- b) fresh, lean meat alone, or
- c) dog food alone.

The diet of a cat should be formulated to take account of -

- a) its age,
- b) whether it is entire or neutered,
- c) in the case of a queen, whether it is pregnant or feeding young,
- d) its size, and
- e) its state of health and body condition (see Appendix 1).

Some cats enjoy raw or cooked meat, offal, fish and milk, but these should be fed only as part of a balanced diet. Some cats can become fixated on certain foods and continually feeding that particular food may result in malnutrition. Their diet should be varied to avoid this.

Kittens should be provided with moist kitten food from the age of 2 - 3 weeks.

It is natural for a cat to display hunting behaviour. This is not linked to hunger, as cats that have recently eaten may still try to hunt.

Cats that are pregnant or feeding kittens, or a cat that is ill, old or young may have different dietary needs from the typical healthy adult cat. Specially formulated life-stage foods are commercially available, otherwise advice on an appropriate diet that takes account of individual circumstances can be obtained from an animal nutritionist or a veterinary surgeon.

A cat must be provided with a food bowl. In a multi-cat household there should be one more food bowl than the total number of cats. Ideally, food bowls should be a full room's distance

from litter trays. The positioning of food bowls must take account of infirmity or any mobility difficulties a particular cat may experience.

Number of Meals

Cats eating habits vary. Some may prefer to eat small meals frequently and to have regular access to food. Others may prefer two larger meals per day. Cats should be fed according to their preference.

Kittens should be fed with small meals more frequently than adults.

Underfeeding and Overfeeding

Ideally a cat should be fed enough to maintain it at a body condition score of 3 (Appendix 1 is a guide to condition scoring).

A cat should not be fed less of a fully balanced diet than is necessary to maintain it in good health and condition except for specific health reasons and in accordance with the advice of a veterinary surgeon or an animal nutritionist.

A cat should not be given more food than it needs. If a cat eats too much it will put on weight and may become obese. This will reduce its quality of life and can also lead to health problems such as heart disease, diabetes mellitus (sugar diabetes) and damage to joints.

Commercial pet foods that are specifically formulated for cats usually provide guidance on the amount to feed to be fed on a daily basis, though this may need to be increased or decreased slightly so as to maintain a suitable body condition.

In the case of doubt, further information can be obtained from an animal nutritionist or a veterinary surgeon.

Milk

A cat's ability to digest its mother's milk is lost after it is weaned. An adult cat no longer has the ability to completely digest milk and drinking milk from other species (cows/goats) can cause diarrhoea. Milk is not a substitute for water and should not be used as a source of hydration. It must be considered as a food.

Water

A cat must always have access to fresh clean water from a clean bowl. Many cats may not drink large amounts, but their thirst may increase in hot weather or if they are fed dried food. Pet water fountains are particularly useful to encourage cats to drink.

Each cat should have its own water bowl. In a multi-cat household there should be one more water bowl than the total number of cats. Water bowls should be half a room's distance from food bowls and a full room's distance from litter trays.

The positioning of water bowls must take account of infirmity or any mobility difficulties a particular cat may experience.

GUIDANCE – LIVING ENVIRONMENT

Sleeping and Resting

A cat will often find its own special place to rest and sleep (which can be both indoors and outdoors). This may change over time, particularly as the seasons change.

If a cat cannot find somewhere safe to rest, its sleep may be disrupted and this can affect its health. It may feel safe when it has access to a sleeping or resting place which is raised and provides a vantage point.

Owners may assist a cat by providing a basket or rug. In a multi-cat household there should be one more sleeping/resting place than the total number of cats and the positioning of sleeping/resting places must take account of infirmity or any mobility difficulties a particular cat may experience.

Toilet

A cat needs to go to the toilet somewhere where it can behave naturally and feel comfortable. Cats prefer a quiet, easily accessible area away from food and water.

A cat should have access to an area in a garden where they can dig and cover urine or faeces with soil or other material, otherwise in situations of limited or restricted access to the outdoors, one deep litter tray for each indoor cat should be provided that should be of adequate size and depth to allow a cat to dig and to squat comfortably.

A litter tray should be placed in an area where a cat feels secure and is not likely to be interrupted by other animals, especially other cats, or people. A litter tray should be positioned away from the place where a cat eats.

Suitable material for litter includes commercial cat litter, waste soda lime crystals, sand, shredded paper and untreated sawdust. Cats generally develop a preference for a particular type of litter when they are young and it is best to continue to use the type of litter that a particular cat prefers.

The positioning of litter trays should take account of infirmity or any mobility difficulties a particular cat may experience.

GUIDANCE - HEALTH

Monitoring Health

The health of a cat should be checked daily, by observing whether it is bright, alert, and responsive, whether it has its normal posture, whether it shows signs of injury, pain or distress and whether it is eating, drinking, urinating, defecating and behaving normally.

Signs of illness or injury in a cat include significant, acute or chronic pain, suffering or distress, repeated straining over a continuous period of 20 minutes, as if to pass urine or faeces, rapidly deteriorating health, profuse or persistent bleeding, behavioural changes such as becoming quiet or withdrawn or a change in eating or drinking habits, swollen limbs or

abnormal gait, discharge from the eyes, ears or nose, serious injury and difficulty breathing. This list is not exhaustive.

It is normal for a cat to vomit to empty its stomach of indigestible contents such as the feathers of birds, grass or fur swallowed during grooming. It is of concern if vomiting continues over 24 – 48 hours or where there are other signs of ill health such as the cat not eating or drinking normally.

Diseases and Illness related to Diet

A number of diseases in cats are caused through inappropriate diet. Even when a cat is fed a nutritionally balanced diet, food sensitivity diseases can occur that result in skin disease (especially scratching or dermatitis) or vomiting and diarrhoea.

Cats should be regularly monitored for the appearance of mouth infections. Mouth infections can enable bacteria and their toxins to enter the bloodstream, resulting in damage to a cat's kidneys, with possibly fatal results. Signs of mouth infection include bad breath, difficulty eating, scratching at the mouth, bleeding from the mouth or a sudden weight loss and an increase in thirst.

Dental problems may arise if soft food is the predominant diet. Feeding larger-sized cat biscuits or meat requiring chewing can help to maintain healthy teeth.

Cats are particularly susceptible to a lack of vitamin B1 (thiamine). This may be caused by feeding a cat dog food, feeding it cat food that is not complete and balanced, feeding it raw fish or may be secondary to a loss of appetite as a result of another condition.

Feeding a cat a diet that is very high in liver can result, over a period of time, in vitamin A toxicity. This may cause severe mobility problems through fusion of the vertebrae.

Dehydration can become a serious problem for cats (especially kittens) when diarrhoea or other conditions occur that cause excessive fluid loss. An increase in thirst may be indicative of kidney damage or a disease such as diabetes.

Veterinary advice should be sought if a cat shows signs of:

- a) food sensitivity such as skin disease, especially scratching or dermatitis, vomiting and diarrhoea,
- b) extreme or unexpected changes in appetite, or
- c) deterioration of tooth and gum health.

Exercise

While cats may appear to spend a large amount of time sleeping, exercise is important for their health and well-being. Feline lower urinary tract disease has been associated with (among other things) reduced exercise.

A cat should have the opportunity to exercise each day to stay fit and healthy.

Hazardous Substances

Cats usually avoid eating things that are harmful, however, in some circumstances, their natural behaviour or curiosity will lead them to eat things that may be harmful.

Cats are meticulously clean animals and they will try to remove any substances that soil their coat, including anything poisonous, such as paints, oil, weed killers and lily pollen.

Unknown or potentially dangerous substances should be cleaned off a cat's coat or feet using a mild liquid detergent, such as washing up liquid. The detergent should be well rinsed off, and the coat or feet dried thoroughly. If this fails to remove the substance, veterinary advice should be sought.

Substances used to clean food and water bowls, litter trays or a cats coat must be suitable for use for cats. Disinfectants containing phenols (those that turn cloudy when mixed with water) must not be used because they are toxic to cats.

Veterinary advice should be sought if there is any concern that a cat has eaten anything that could be harmful.

Safety

Cats (especially kittens) are curious about their surroundings and tend to seek out warmth.

Care should be taken to protect a cat from potentially dangerous household appliances (such as heaters, boilers, cookers, clothes dryers and washing machines) and also from access to poisonous substances (such as rodent bait, lilies (Lilium family), anti-freeze and human psoriasis cream).

Cats may also investigate cupboards, sheds, cars and garages and care should be taken to ensure that they are not shut in.

Care of Coat

Cats are fastidious groomers and, in general, will take good care of their coat. However a cat's coat should be checked at least once a week for mats and, if possible, these should be groomed or teased out. If this is not possible, mats should be removed by careful cutting with scissors (with care taken not to cut skin). In the case of difficulty or doubt, advice should be obtained from a veterinary surgeon or a professional groomer.

Failure of a cat to groom itself is often a sign of ill health.

External Parasites

A cat's coat should be examined at least once per week for the presence of parasites and their eggs and faeces.

External parasites include fleas, mites and lice. As a guide their presence may be indicated by excessive grooming, scratching, fur loss, scabs or scale. Fleas or flea dirt (black coils that turn red when moistened with water) may also be seen in the coat. If there is evidence of extensive infestation or disease caused by parasites, veterinary advice should be obtained.

The ears of cats, especially young cats, should be checked regularly for evidence of ear mites. An infestation may cause excessive scratching of the ears and a dark-brown discharge inside the ears.

Diseases of the Skin

There are a number of skin diseases that can cause considerable stress and distress in cats.

Dermatitis and eczema are common problems and there are many causes including allergies, parasitic diseases, infections, nutritional imbalances and hormonal disorders.

Cancer can occur in many forms in cats, but the most common form occurs in cats with white ears or noses. Ultraviolet radiation from the sun can cause the skin on the edge of the ears or nose to ulcerate and slowly erode away. If left too long this form of cancer can become untreatable, so early detection and treatment is necessary.

Light-coloured cats should be protected from the threat of skin cancer with the regular application on nose and ears of appropriate animal sunscreen, especially during summer.

Abscesses may result from wounds (caused by fighting) that become infected. Such abscesses are very painful and may also result in the spread of infection that may have further serious consequences for the health of a cat.

As few of these conditions are resolved without appropriate treatment, veterinary advice should be sought.

Care of Claws

Scratching or claw conditioning is part of normal cat behaviour as regular scratching removes the frayed and worn outer claws and exposes the new and sharper claws growing underneath. It also exercises and strengthens the muscles used when the claws move in and out of the paw, which is essential for a cat's normal behaviour of climbing and catching prey. There are also glands between the pads of a cat's feet and scratching leaves scent marks to mark territorial boundaries.

Cats prefer to condition their claws on something tall enough for them to exercise at full stretch and which is stable enough so that it does not fall over when used.

The claws of older and indoor cats may become overgrown because they no longer retract normally. They should be trimmed carefully, while avoiding damage to the quick which will result in pain and bleeding.

In the case of doubt, advice should be obtained from a veterinary surgeon or a professional animal groomer.

Hygiene

Food and water bowls should be washed daily to prevent contamination that may pose a threat to the health of a cat. They should be rinsed and dried in a manner that will not spread infectious diseases (such as air-drying or drying with a disposable paper towel).

Care should be taken to clean around food bowls daily to remove small pieces of discarded food that may harbour saliva and infectious agents.

Uneaten moist food will quickly spoil and attract flies, vermin and other animals and should be disposed of, or refrigerated, as soon as a cat has eaten what it requires. Dry food should be stored in a rodent-proof container and moist food (i.e. meat and opened cans) kept in a refrigerator.

Litter trays should be checked daily and cleared of faeces and moisture-laden litter or the litter changed to prevent contamination that may pose a threat to the health of a cat. Once a week litter trays should be washed in hot, soapy water; disinfected (ideally soaked in diluted household bleach, for 5 – 10 minutes) and thoroughly rinsed and dried.

Used litter should be buried deeply, or bagged and sealed for rubbish disposal.

Disinfectants containing phenols (those that turn cloudy when mixed with water) must not be used to clean food and water bowls or litter trays because they are toxic to cats.

Bedding must be regularly cleaned and washed or removed and replaced in order to manage parasites.

Disinfectants and any other cleaning products should be formulated for use with animals or be used at a dilution that will not cause a cat irritation or harm.

Collars

If used, it is important that a collar is sufficiently snug around a cat's neck to prevent it catching on objects or vegetation. Collars that are too loose around the neck are a hazard, as a cat may get a front leg or its lower jaw caught through the collar. As a guide, two fingers should be able to fit snugly between the collar and a cat's neck.

Only collars that are elasticised or which have a quick-release mechanism should be used.

Good-quality flea collars reduce a flea population but do not provide complete flea control, particularly for cats with an allergy to fleas.

GUIDANCE - BEHAVIOUR

Socialisation

Whilst cats may be sociable with other cats, they originate from ancestors that lived a very solitary life and they are not as sociable as other species, such as dogs. As a result they may fight other cats, which may result in serious injuries.

Cats can form social groups with other cats that they have grown up with or know well, but may feel very threatened by cats from outside such a group. The tolerance of cats towards other cats also varies, so their ability and desire to socialise can vary enormously. A cat needs the opportunity to find solitude within a home.

Some cats are naturally more confident than others. However, the way that each cat behaves is also influenced by experiences during the first eleven weeks of life. Generally, cats that are

well 'socialised' at an early age will be able to cope confidently as adults, with most new situations and with people.

Handling kittens from the age of 3 weeks will help them to become accustomed to people. The essential age for socialisation of kittens is from 3 – 11 weeks of age, but they should not be forced to socialise when they are fearful or anxious.

Managing Boredom, Frustration and Stress

A cat owner should ensure a kitten meets and interacts with people, including children, with dogs and with other cats as well as coming into contact with normal household sights and sounds. Adult cats that have not had this type of early experience may find it difficult to cope with day-to-day home life and may be stressed or very nervous, hiding away a great deal of the time.

If a cat does not, or cannot, go outdoors it should be provided with mental and physical stimulation. This can take the form of the owner playing with it to mimic hunting behaviour, using indoor toys and games such as a lightweight rolling toy or one that involves catching behaviour (fishing rod type toys). Indoor cats can also be provided with 'puzzle feeders' that release dried food gradually.

A common cause of stress in a cat is close contact with other cats that it does not like. This may occur if it meets another cat which it perceives to be invading its territory. In these situations the resident cat will increase its territory marking in the form of scratching and urine spraying at its territorial boundaries. A cat can also be stressed if it is kept together with a lot of other cats, particularly if it does not have access to the outdoors.

Signs of Stress

Cats respond to stress in different ways. In most cases, when cats are afraid, they prefer to run away to a quiet and hidden location. This is normal behaviour, but if a cat is frightened or cannot escape, this can lead to aggression. Some cats prefer to hide inside or under things while others prefer to climb up high.

Prolonged stress may lead to changes in behaviour that may include:

- a) being quiet and subdued or going missing for a few days,
- b) being very nervous and watchful,
- c) being unusually aggressive to people or other cats,
- d) stopping eating, drinking or grooming,
- e) overeating,
- f) being restless and not sleeping/sleeping excessively,
- g) howling or making unusual vocal sounds,
- h) panting,
- i) soiling or spraying urine indoors,
- j) persistently hiding away,
- k) being unusually affectionate,
- l) pacing or 'patrolling' around the house,
- m) excessive grooming of the coat, or pulling out fur, and
- n) being hypersensitive or over-reactive.

This list is not exhaustive.

Advice

Advice on behavioural problems can be obtained from an animal behaviourist or a veterinary surgeon.

GUIDANCE - BREEDING

Mating, Pregnancy, Birthing and Lactation

Only cats that are adult, well developed, in good health and condition and with a favourable temperament should be used for breeding. The gestation period of a cat is 61 – 65 days.

Prior to a queen giving birth, a suitable box for the birthing should be provided in a safe, warm, dry and quiet environment.

In the later stages of pregnancy, and during lactation, a queen should be fed a complete and balanced diet that meets the nutritional demands of pregnancy/lactation. While feeding, the queen needs to have access to clean, fresh water at all times.

Kittens should be restricted, by keeping them in a pen or similar enclosure for the first several weeks of their life.

Tom cats should be kept away from kittens to prevent them from being harmed or killed.

Removal of Kittens from the Queen

Kittens' eyes will not normally open until 7 – 12 days after birth and the queen will usually begin restricting access to herself at 4 – 5 weeks and weaning is usually completed by 8 weeks.

To ensure adequate socialisation to other cats, kittens should not be removed from their mothers before 10 weeks of age, and preferably 12 weeks of age.

Kittens should be at least 10 weeks old when removed from the queen and must be capable of independent life before being moved to a new home.

New owners should be provided with information on feeding and any records of veterinary treatment, worming and vaccinations that a kitten may have received.

Neutering

Ideally, a cat not intended for breeding should be neutered before puberty (any time after 3 months of age and before 5 months of age). Female cats should be neutered before their first season, this usually happens when they are between 4 to 6 months old. Early neutering does not adversely affect the physiological or behavioural development of cats.

Neutered cats are less likely to wander and fight, so there is less likelihood of them becoming infected or spreading diseases to other cats.

Neutering also prevents the development of uterine and testicular cancer and reduces the risk of female cats developing mammary tumours.

GUIDANCE - TRANSPORTATION

An adult cat may show varying degrees of anxiety when transported in a vehicle and it should be transported in a secure container for its own safety.

A container should:

- a) provide a cat with sufficient space to stand, turn around and rest normally,
- b) provide adequate ventilation, and
- c) be smooth (on the inside), with no projections that could cause injury to a cat.

Bedding such as a blanket should be provided in a container. A cloth covering the container (provided it does not impede ventilation) may help some cats to travel with less stress.

A container should not be placed in a vehicle where a cat will become too hot, such as in direct sunlight or next to a heater. The temperature in a closed vehicle in full sun can reach 50 °C in less than half an hour. In a closed container, the temperature of a cat will rise rapidly, which will produce extreme distress and may ultimately lead to its death.

Cats must not be left unattended in a vehicle in warm weather unless the environment within the vehicle is climate controlled or otherwise ventilated such that temperature is maintained below 21°C in the shade.

If a cat is to be transported a over long distance relevant advice should be sought from a veterinary surgeon.

This guidance is given by the Department with a view to securing the welfare of cats. It is additional to the Welfare Recommendations set out in the [Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Domestic Cats](#) made by the Department. A breach of the Code may be relied upon in Court proceedings.

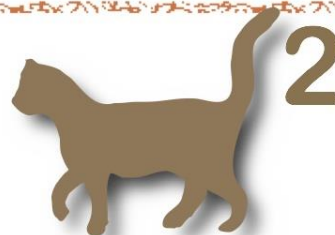
Appendix 1. Cat Body Condition Score Chart

Body Condition Scoring

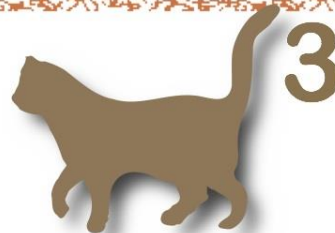
Ribs, spine and bony protrusions are easily seen at a distance. These pets have lost muscle mass and there is no observable body fat. Emaciated, bony, and starved in appearance.



Ribs, spine and other bones are easily felt. These pets have an obvious waist when viewed from above and have an abdominal tuck. Thin, lean or skinny in appearance.



Ribs and spine are easily felt but not necessarily seen. There is a waist when viewed from above and the abdomen is raised and not sagging when viewed from the side. Normal, ideal and often muscular in appearance.



Ribs and spine are hard to feel or count underneath fat deposits. Waist is distended or often pear-shaped when viewed from above. The abdomen sags when seen from the side. There are typically fat deposits on the hips, base of tail and chest. Overweight, heavy, husky or stout.



Large fat deposits over the chest, back, tail base and hindquarters. The abdomen sags prominently and there is no waist when viewed from above. The chest and abdomen often appear distended or swollen. Obese.



Association for Pet Obesity Prevention

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