

AAFP releases new how to feed a cat consensus statement to the veterinary community

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The American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) today released the AAFP Consensus Statement, "Feline Feeding Programs:

Addressing Behavioral Needs to Improve Feline Health and Wellbeing" and accompanying client brochure to the veterinary community. The Consensus Statement, published in the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery*, explores the medical, social, and emotional problems that can result from the manner in which most cats are currently fed. This statement focuses on "how to feed" because an often-overlooked aspect of feline health is how cats are fed.

This Consensus Statement identifies normal feeding behaviors in [cats](#). It provides strategies to allow these normal feline feeding behaviors, such as hunting and foraging, and eating frequent small meals in a solitary fashion, to occur in the home environment—even in a multi-pet home. Allowing cats to exhibit these normal feeding behaviors regularly, can help alleviate or prevent stress-related issues such as cystitis, and/or obesity-related problems such as inactivity and overeating. Reducing stress with appropriate feeding programs can also help anxious cats, who in an attempt to avoid other pets in the household, may not access the food frequently enough and lose weight.

"Currently, most pet cats are fed in one location ad libitum, or receive one or two large and usually quite palatable meals daily. In addition, many indoor cats have little environmental stimulation, and eating can become an activity in and of itself," says the Consensus Statement's chair, Tammy Sadek, DVM, DABVP (Feline). "This current type of feeding process does not address the behavioral needs of cats. Appropriate feeding programs need to be customized for each household, and should incorporate the needs of all cats for play, predation, and a location to eat and drink where they feel safe."

The Consensus Statement and accompanying client brochure offer useful strategies for cat caregivers to understand feeding preferences and provide the proper environment for feeding that makes cats happier and helps them avoid overfeeding or underfeeding. The Consensus Statement

also highlights the importance of feeding programs, which should be designed to consider whether they are indoor-only or have outdoor access, live in multi-pet households, or are aged or debilitated. These feeding programs in many cases include offering frequent small meals using appropriate puzzle feeders, forage feeding (putting food in different locations), multiple food and water stations, and in some instances, automatic feeders. Veterinary professionals and clients need to work together to develop and implement a safe, effective feeding program that optimizes each cat's physical and emotional health and wellbeing.

Cat caregivers concerned with their cat's weight and health, have multiple cats in the home, or are concerned with overfeeding/underfeeding, are encouraged to seek guidance from their veterinarian. Additionally, appropriate nutrition and feeding programs should be discussed during the cat's routine check-up. Visit catfriendly.com/find-a-vet to find an AAFP Member or Cat Friendly Practice.

More information: To access the Consensus Statement and client brochure, visit: catvets.com/howtofeedcats

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