

How should we

Are they being fed correctly?

- ✓ We often wonder in our clinical practice if pet owners are feeding their pets correctly. The causes of extreme thinness or obesity may be due to poor adjustment between the energy requirements (ER) and the food ration (R) or to incorrectly providing it.
- ✓ The pet's feeding regime, any possible changes to said regime, and the pet's environment (vacation periods in open areas, presence of other pets, elderly people, or children, the owner's health, etc.), should be reflected in the animal's medical records. Various factors can affect the frequency and quantity of food offered.

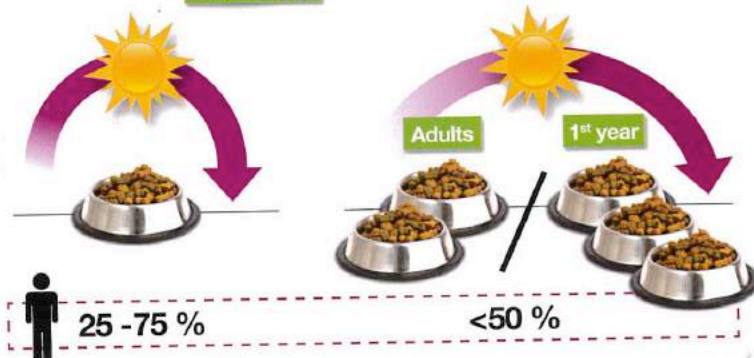


Body condition



Feeding methods

- ✓ Studies show that most dog owners feed their dogs once daily (25-75 %), and the proportion that feeds them twice daily (<50 %) or three times per day is less, with the last option only present in the first year of the animal's life.
- ✓ We can distinguish three alternatives for feeding healthy animals. Each feeding regimen has its advantages and disadvantages.



1

Free feeding (ad libitum)

- ✓ This consists of leaving a large amount of food permanently available to the pet. Special feeders of different sizes are generally used from 1.5 to 40 kg.
- ✓ There is one variation that is used especially with cats: food is released into the dish as it is consumed.
- ✓ Dry food is usually used in these cases. Using this feeding technique with wet foods has three main problems:
 - Poor acceptance due to loss of freshness.
 - Difficulty cleaning the dish.
 - Microbial contamination of the food due to its high water content.
- ✓ This type of feeding is frequent in animals that live in rural environments (working or hunting animals), shelters or adoption centers, and in homes with yards.



ADVANTAGES

- ✓ No continuous work is required nor special skills from the feeder.
- ✓ Problems of under-feeding and aggressiveness from dominance are avoided in large dog pounds, keeping the animals calmer.

DISADVANTAGES

- ✗ Less control over the animals' state of health.
- ✗ Less control over the ingestion of the food and its acceptance.
- ✗ Predisposition to obesity and vomiting due to excessive volume of food in the stomach.

feed our pets?

2

Restricted free feeding

- ✓ The daily ration is calculated for the pet's requirements and provided in a continuous manner in the feeder until it is completely consumed. This is likely the most widely used method for dogs and cats.
- ✓ It is the first choice system for cats as it is similar to their natural feeding patterns: several times per day in small amounts regardless of circadian rhythms.



ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

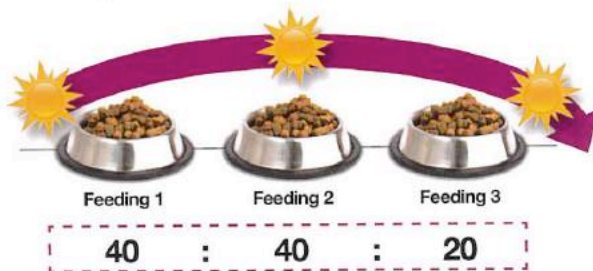
- ✓ This ensures stricter control over the dose of food, the animals' appetite and their variations in weight and body condition.
- ✗ It requires a certain amount of attention and precision when preparing the food ration.
- ✗ The owner must dedicate time to this task.



3

Fixed-schedule controlled feeding

- ✓ This is the most complex system of all. It requires the greatest responsibility, but it also achieves a greater bond between the owner and the pet.
- ✓ This is the ideal system. It is recommended for all pets on a treatment involving the use of dietary foods.
- ✓ Putting this method into practice from early ages is the best option, as if it were ever necessary in the future, the dog or cat would already be used to this regime (for example, diabetic patients or those predisposed to gastric dilation).
- ✓ This method is based on dividing the animal's total daily ration into two, or preferably three feedings with a limited time access of 10-20 minutes, and up to 1 or 2 hours in the case of some cats. The pet is called beforehand and the same location is always used for feeding (patio, kitchen, washroom...). After the aforementioned time, the food dish is removed and no more food is given until the next feeding.



ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

- ✓ Correct management of the daily dose.
- ✓ Control of the appetite and the state of health.
- ✓ Prevention of weight gain.
- ✗ It requires a little more time, dedication, and habit changes from the owners.

- ✓ Any remaining food will not be given in the next feedings, with a few exceptions: some dogs and cats do not eat the same amount at each feeding and in this case, we can reduce the amount of food for the morning feeding and increase it equally in the other two feedings (for example, 40:40:20).



- ✓ For this type of feeding, we can combine dry and wet foods to find the greatest acceptance by the patient.

Learning

1

Guidelines for correct feeding

Except with free-choice feeding, a series of guidelines should be followed with all feeding systems:

- ✓ **Pets should be taught to eat:** from a very early age, cats and dogs develop a preference or aversion for certain types of food. In the same way, they will also prefer certain tastes and smells. Knowing and making the most of these preferences will thus allow us to correctly manage their diet.
- ✓ **Always in the same place:** pets should have a set place to eat.
- ✓ **In a quiet environment:** in order to avoid aggressive behavior or competition, every pet should be given a quiet area where to eat.
- ✓ **No pressure from the owners:** owners should not watch their pets eat or encourage them to eat.



✓ **All pets should have their own bowl.**



2

Appetite disorders: picky eaters

Our patients are sometimes reluctant to eat certain types of food. Three usual situations are:



Picky eaters



Senior patients



Sick animals

In the case of old or sick animals it is usually due to a loss of the senses of taste and smell and/or to anorexia-inducing metabolic disorders (because of the disease itself or the treatments used).



Anorexia

Complete loss of appetite before eating.

Appetite



Hyporexia

Decreased appetite for all or certain types of food.

Appetite



to eat

- ✓ **With a feeding time protocol:** Cats and dogs should not be fed large meals at the end of the day or immediately after exercising (they should be fed at least an hour after moderate/intense physical activity).

- ✓ **They should be given a 2-hour rest period after each meal.** Most of the digestive process in the stomach will have taken place by the end of that period. This is an important guideline in cats and dogs with a predisposition to suffer from gastric dilatation-volvulus.



3

Teaching them how and when to eat

- ✓ **Self-control:** one of the most common mistakes when training a pet, especially a dog, is the lack of discipline and self-control. Training should start before three months of age, to be completed progressively until adult age. Pets must be taught how and when to eat so they can control their desire to eat and not feel frustrated when they are not given any food.
- ✓ **Training their senses:** with a conditioning process, their senses of taste and smell can be trained to ensure they accept a wide variety of flavors, textures and smells.
- ✓ **Do not give in:** when pets refuse to eat a complete and balanced diet, we should not be tempted to give them a more appetising type of food, as this is how they will turn into picky eaters.

Many of these pets usually have a dominant behavior at the veterinary clinic, making consultations and procedures more complicated (sometimes risky).

In these cases, there is a hierarchy problem. Although the owner should not be blamed for this behavior, both the pet and the owner will need to be retrained. Healthy animals with a picky appetite will eventually eat the food they are given if managed with common sense.



- ✓ **Cats are the exception to this rule:** they can refuse to eat for long periods of time if the food is not palatable. In this case, it is necessary to study the cause of this refusal. They should not be left more than three days without eating: the effects of fasting on the organism can be lethal (hepatic lipodosis possibly due to the mobilization of fat and the lack of protein to synthesize lipoproteins).



- ✓ **Training tool:** food should be used as a reward for something done but never as a gift. The point is not to limit their access to food but to adjust it. That is why it is important to give them access to food at a set time and for a set period of time (e.g., at 8:00 am for 10 minutes).

Factors involved in appetite loss

The picky appetite of some pets is mainly conditioned by the following factors:

- ✓ Lack of knowledge of the stages of taste development.
- ✓ Poor habits of the owners.
- ✓ Preference or aversion for certain smells or tastes.
- ✓ Moving house or stressful situations.
- ✓ Poor palatability/acceptance of the diet fed.
- ✓ Aging.
- ✓ Diseases and drugs for their treatment.