

Hit or Myth?

I came to a horrible realization a few months ago about my cat. As I watched him attempt to roll over onto his back with about as much grace and success as a seal in mud, the truth hit me: My cat was not a big-boned cat, he was not a cute, chubby cat – he was, in fact, a fat cat.

Like any good cat owner I knew I needed to address his weight immediately and help him be more active, but getting Jabba the Hutt on board with my plan proved difficult, to say the least.

I tried all sorts of fun activities to lure him away from his beloved pastime of napping.

I bought a wand with feathers on the end of it and twirled it around and around with great gusto. Through squinted, sleepy eyes he let me know my gusto was bothering him.

I ran around the house one afternoon making clicking noises with my mouth, inviting him to a fun game of chase, but I was the only one who worked up a sweat that day.

I rolled crinkly balls and fake, chirping mice past his large head, but the biggest response I got from him was an agitated yawn.

Fine. If he wasn't going to move it and lose it I would have to address his weight through better nutrition.

I made an appointment with my vet to get her advice on what I should change in my cat's diet, and the information she gave surprised me.

According to my vet, allowing my cat to free-feed (having kibble down all day for him to eat when he pleases) was not necessary and in this case, even harmful, as the extra pounds he was carrying could lead to diabetes and other diseases.

My vet recommended I slowly wean my cat off of his free-feeding schedule and get him used to eating only twice a day, making sure he got enough calories to sustain his ideal weight.

When I got home I immediately started researching this topic, as I had always been led to believe cats were natural grazers and should be allowed to eat as much and whenever they wanted.

I learned I was completely wrong. *Herbivores*, such as cows and sheep, are natural grazers. Cats, however, are 98% *carnivores*, and when in the wild, are natural meal-feeders, eating only a couple of times a day.

Researchers observed feral cat colonies and found that cats follow a specific behavior pattern: they hunt, eat, wash, sleep, and eventually repeat. Cats will catch and consume a meal in one sitting and will then head off and rest for hours until hunger eventually stirs them to hunt again.

Meal-feeding is how cats were designed to eat. The whole notion that cats were grazers was a myth.

I took my knew-found knowledge and immediately began weaning my cat off of his free-feeding schedule. I also incorporated more wet food into his two daily meals to make sure my precious carnivore was getting enough real protein in his diet.

As you might have guessed, he was not at all pleased with me or the changes at first, and if looks could kill I would not be writing these words. But eventually he got used to this new way of eating and the weight came off.

I am now happy to report he is a healthy and much more active cat, and able to roll over with the best of them.