

My Cat Gobbles Too Much Food

CatChannel expert Marilyn Krieger, CCBC, offers suggestions for reining in out-of-control appetites.

By Marilyn Krieger

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Q: My cat Sweetie Pie gulps her canned and dry food down and then wants more. She also rushes over and eats her sibling's food. Her sister likes to take her time when eating, grazing all day long from her dry food bowl. Unfortunately, porking out has caused Sweetie Pie to lose her girlish figure. She now waddles. What can I do? Can I train Sweetie Pie to not gulp down her and her sister's food? I feed them once a day, in the morning.

A: Obesity is a serious issue for many of our cat companions. Before putting any cat on a diet or making sudden diet changes, please consult with your veterinarian.

Start encouraging Sweetie Pie to not inhale her food by changing the meal schedules. Instead of giving your cats only one meal a day, consider having multiple small feedings throughout the day. Be consistent with the feedings, offering your cats their meals at the same times every day. My cats are fed four times a day. Since it's unreasonable for your cats to expect you to stay home all day so that you can serve them their meals, consider getting automatic timed feeders. Some models dispense canned while other dispense dry food at predetermined times. I found one automatic feeder that dispenses treat balls on a schedule.

Sweetie Pie's eating style can be changed from hyper drive to the speed limit by making meal times fun. Instead of leaving bowls of dry food out for the cats, encourage both cats to work for their meals. Put the dry food in feline treat balls. Treat balls are hard, hollow balls with holes in them. The cat's regular dry food can be placed inside the balls. In order for Sweetie Pie and her sister to eat the food, they will have to knock the balls around so that the food will fall out of the holes. I recommend two or three treat balls placed in different parts of the house so that Sweetie Pie's sister can eat uninterrupted. Sweetie Pie will only be able to attack one treat ball at a time, allowing her sister time to munch down. At first you might have to demonstrate to the cats how the treat balls work. Some cats catch on to the treat ball concept faster than others. Treat balls are also very neat because Sweetie Pie will have to exercise and expend some calories in order to eat. Monitor the food intake so that you can make sure that both cats are eating enough food.

If possible, separate the cats during meal times. Put Sweetie Pie's sister in her own room and close the door, so that she can eat in peace. I do realize she's a grazer, but by having multiple specific feeding times during the day she should get used to eating her meals when they are given to her.