

Solving the fat cat and thin cat problem in a multicat home

Case summary

Names: Kyra and Sammie
Age: 9 years, 4 months (siblings)
Sex: Females/neutered

Start weight: Kyra — 3.7 kg and Sammie — 4.9 kg
Ideal weight for both cats: 4.0 kg

In this case study Carla Nienhuis, a veterinary nurse with a huge interest in cats, tells us about the lengths she has gone to in her own house to try and solve the fat cat/thin cat problem.

Kyra and Sammie are two sisters (Figure 1); although they look quite similar, there is a big difference in their eating habits. Kyra likes to eat several small amounts during the day, while Sammie eats her daily amount of food in one and, if she gets the chance, she eats Kyra's food as well. As a result, Sammie is gaining weight and Kyra is losing weight.

So how to solve the fat cat and thin cat problem? We had to find a way to separate



Figure 1: Sisters, Kyra and Sammie, aged 9 years, have very different eating habits



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Carla Nienhuis graduated as a veterinary nurse in 2013. She increased her skills in the field of feline medicine and behaviour by completing the ISFM Certificate in Feline Friendly Nursing in 2014. She currently works as a cat behaviour counsellor in a mixed veterinary practice and has her own business in animal care.

our cats at mealtimes, but also make sure that Kyra had the opportunity to eat at her own pace, in several meals if she preferred.

Our scullery/utility room was due to be reconstructed and therefore we decided to sacrifice two kitchen cabinets to make feeding houses for our cats. To make sure both cats could only enter their own house, we placed a microchip cat flap in the door. Unfortunately, the houses are smaller than expected, so we had to be creative to ensure there was enough space inside. As you can see the flaps are placed to the side of each cupboard door (Figure 2a and b) and we placed a raised feeding bowl just to the right or left of the door (Figure 2c). When the cat goes

Case study



Figure 2: (a and b) Two cupboards were converted to feeding houses, one for each cat. (c) With microchip only access, feeding can be individually controlled

Feeding houses

- Make sure the houses are big enough, so you can place a feeding puzzle inside (for average cats [4 kg] w 50 x d 60 cm).
- Use an automatic feeder during the night to create more feeding opportunities for underweight cats (Figure 2c).
- Train your cats to use the houses step by step! Use treats to motivate the cats to enter their feeding house via the microchip cat flap.
- Provide proper ventilation and light.
- At least once a day feed the cats outside the houses using feeding enrichment (treat balls, puzzle feeders, playing) to avoid boredom.

Advantages of feeding houses:

- ensures that prescription food is consumed by the right cat;
- each cat can eat at its own pace and return to the food as many times as it wants to;
- cats can't steal each other's food.



Tip

Solving the problem of the fat cat and thin cat living in the same home can be a challenge. Separate feeding houses are one solution, others are:

- **microchip feeders** — these devices only allow the cat with the programmed chip to eat the food;
- **feeding separately** — to increase the overall food intake of the thinner cat, feed it at a different location and at additional times to the other cat;
- **puzzle feeders** — the overweight cat can be fed portions of its daily food in treat balls or puzzle feeders to encourage activity.



in, she has to turn around to eat and the door flap then closes easily.

Outcome

At the time of writing, I can't say anything about the outcome, we are after all just starting, but the cats are less stressed now they are not competing for food and both seem happier and accepting of their new feeding regime.