When you bring your new pet home, you’ll need to establish their diet and a feeding schedule. Feeding your dog or cat the right food helps to ensure their best health, energy, and vitality. Ideally, you should stick with the food and feeding schedule that your pet was experiencing at the shelter to help them transition into their new home. After a week, you can begin to adjust their food or feeding schedule — just make sure to do it gradually. If you want to change your pet’s diet after adoption, consult with your veterinarian about the best food to feed them and how much to feed them. Many factors go into the decision, including your pet’s age, existing medical conditions, oral health, preferences and “tastes,” and your preferences and budget. Whatever you decide, it’s important to feed your pet a complete, balanced food.

## How To Transition Your Pet to New FoodMix in the new food with the old food gradually, over the course of 1 to 2 weeks. This will help both your pet’s taste buds and their tummy, intestinal enzymes and beneficial bacteria, adapt and become used to the new diet. This change can often be safely completed in as little as seven days, but if your pet has a particularly picky appetite or sensitive stomach, extending the change over 2 weeks will usually ensure a smoother transition.**- Days 1 and 2 (or 1-4):** Mix 25% new food with 75% old food**- Days 3, 4, and 5 (or 5-10):** Mix 50% new food with 50% old food**- Days 6 and 7 (or 11-14):** Mix 75% new food with 25% old foodFeeding a Puppy or Dog

**How Much:** How much to feed your dog or puppy depends on their age, weight, and activity level, as well as the calorie count and nutrient density of the food. While the label on a bag of food can give you an estimate, it’s best to work with your veterinarian to determine how much food your dog should eat each day.
**When:** Feeding your dog or puppy on a schedule will help them settle into a routine in their new home. Avoid free feeding, or grazing, as it can lead to obesity and can delay your recognition of problems with feeding (like decreased appetite). Rather than free feeding, take the amount of food they should eat daily and feed half of the amount in the morning and the other in the evening. This can help to make potty training and crate training easier since you can better time their potty breaks. For the food gobblers, feeding with interactive toys or puzzles can help slow down their eating, while providing mental and physical exercise.
**Transitioning to Adult Food:** Your puppy needs more calories and different ratios of certain nutrients to grow and mature the best way and rate possible, which is why feeding them a puppy-specific formula of food is best. Breed and other factors can influence when is the best time to transition a puppy to adult food, but it typically happens between 1 and 2 years of age. Talk to your veterinarian to find out the right time to transition to adult-stage food.

Feeding a Kitten or Cat

**How Much:** How much to feed your cat varies depending on their age, weight, and the nutritional density of what they’re eating. Refer to the feeding instructions on the cat food label to determine how much to feed your cat each day and consult with your veterinarian.

**When:** A feeding routine will help your cat know what to expect at mealtimes and can make the process more enjoyable for you both. You can put out an entire day’s serving of dry food each morning and cats can graze on it throughout the day. If you or your cat prefer, you can divide the total amount of food each day into two or three meals. Wet cat food should be consumed within 20 to 30 minutes of serving and any remaining food should be refrigerated and eaten within 24 hours of opening.

**Choose the Right Dish:** Cats’ whiskers help them to navigate their surroundings, determine the width of openings and even communicate their mood. Deep bowls with high sides may irritate your cat’s whiskers, which can negatively impact their mealtime experience. This phenomenon is described as “whisker stress” and can be upsetting to themThe best types of cat bowls or plates are shallow and wide with a small lip. These types of dishes allow your cat to eat without any whisker irritation. A shallow bowl also lets them remain aware of her surroundings as she eats, which can make her feel more at ease.
**Transitioning to Adult Food:** It’s important to feed your cat food that’s appropriate for their life stage. Your cat should be eating a kitten-specific formula through around 1 year of age, or they’re about 90% of their adult weight. Work with your veterinarian to determine the right time to transition to adult cat food.

Allergies and Intolerances
You likely won’t know initially if your newly adopted cat or dog has allergies or intolerances to different proteins or other aspects of their food. If an allergy was suspected by the shelter or your pet’s previous owner, work with your veterinarian to properly diagnose the allergy. If you do decide to transition your pet to a food that is different from what they ate at the shelter, do so slowly and watch out for changes in their poop, if they throw up, or if they develop a skin rash, which could indicate an allergy or intolerance to an ingredient in their food.

Don’t Forget to Factor in Treats
Although it can be tempting to give your dog or cat treats all the time, too many treats can cause health problems like obesity and also cause problems with them eating their actual food. Treats should be kept to a maximum of 10% of your pet’s daily calories. For training purposes, your pet’s dry food can be used as training treats.

If Your New Cat or Dog Won’t Eat
Sometimes a newly adopted pet won’t eat great right away. The adoption process paired with a new environment can be a stressful transition for them. If your new dog or cat won’t eat, you can try adding the following items to their food temporarily to encourage their appetite:

* Boiled rice
* Boiled chicken (no skin, seasoning, or bones)
* Meat-based baby food
* Canned (wet) food
* Mix in a few treats

If you’ve tried these tips and your new cat or dog isn’t eating anything, it’s time for a call and visit to the veterinarian, as there could be a medical problem causing it.