

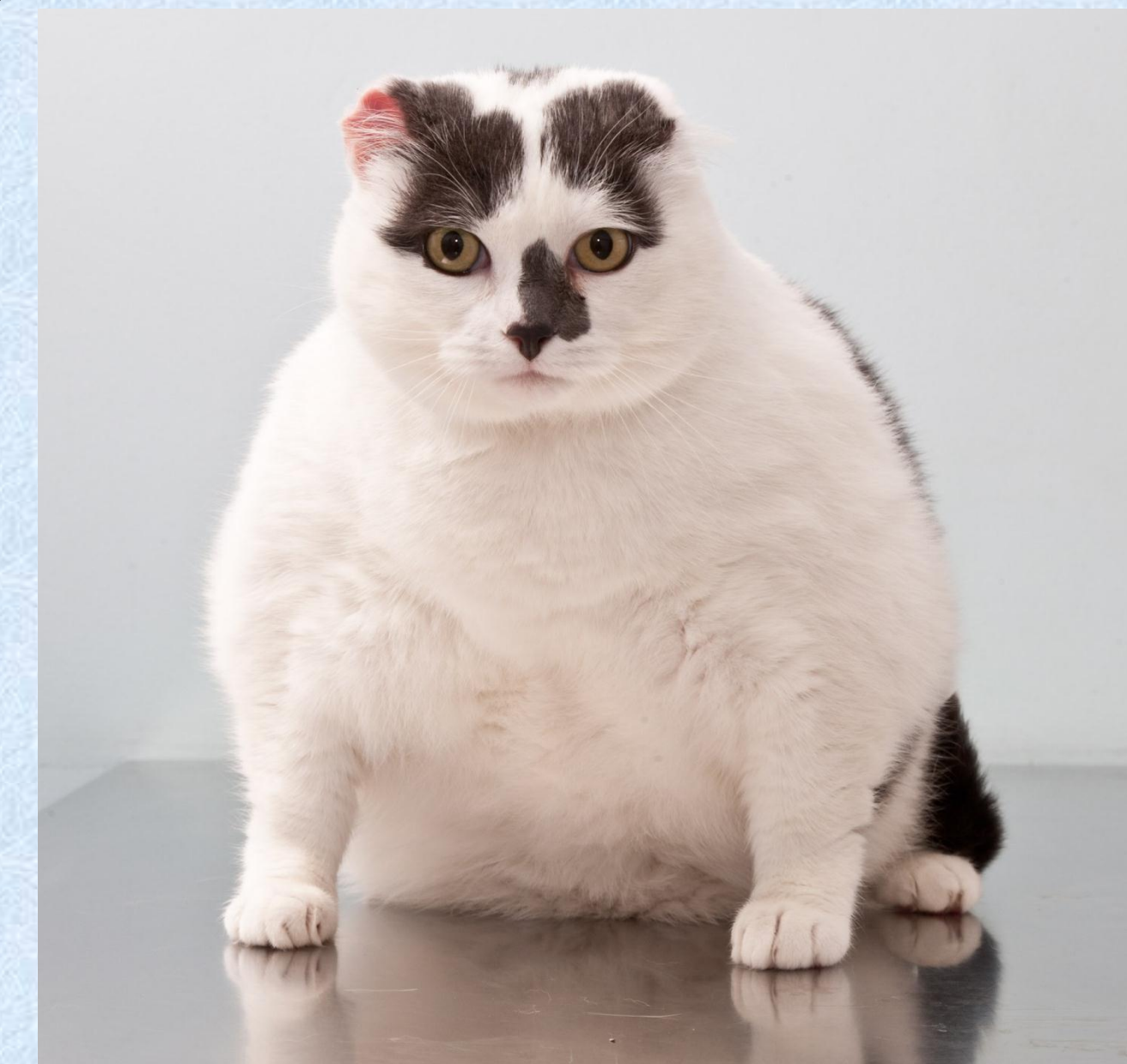
CHARACTERISTICS OF A RESCUE KITTEN COHORT, OWNER FEEDING PRACTICES AND PERCEPTION OF FELINE BODY CONDITION IN A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF EARLY LIFE RISK FACTORS FOR FELINE HEALTH AND WELFARE OUTCOMES

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BACKGROUND

- ☛ Cat relinquishment to rescue organisations is often due to behavioural problems. These behavioural problems directly affect the welfare of cats.
- ☛ Another serious feline welfare issue is obesity. The prevalence of feline obesity in the UK has increased to an estimated 39%. It is linked to many diseases and may ultimately decrease lifespan.



AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

- ☛ The 'Cat Longitudinal Analysis of Welfare Study' ('C.L.A.W.S.', www.bristol.ac.uk/vetscience/claws) aims to use prospectively collected data to **identify early life risk factors for behavioural problems and health issues** such as obesity, with more certainty than previous cross-sectional studies, which are unable to rule out reverse causality.
- ☛ Kittens aged 8 – 24 weeks were recruited (01/5/12 – 01/05/13) at point of adoption from UK rehoming organisations.
- ☛ Data are collected via owner completed questionnaires until kittens reach 2 years of age.
- ☛ First questionnaires of 300 kittens (aged 8-24 weeks) were analysed to provide **background information** on the kitten cohort after six months of recruitment, and to describe two putative risk factors for feline obesity: **feeding regimen** and **owner perception of feline body condition (FBC)**.

RESULTS

KITTEN COHORT



SEX	
FEMALE	44.8%
BREED	
NON-PEDIGREE	92.1%
PEDIGREE	7.9%

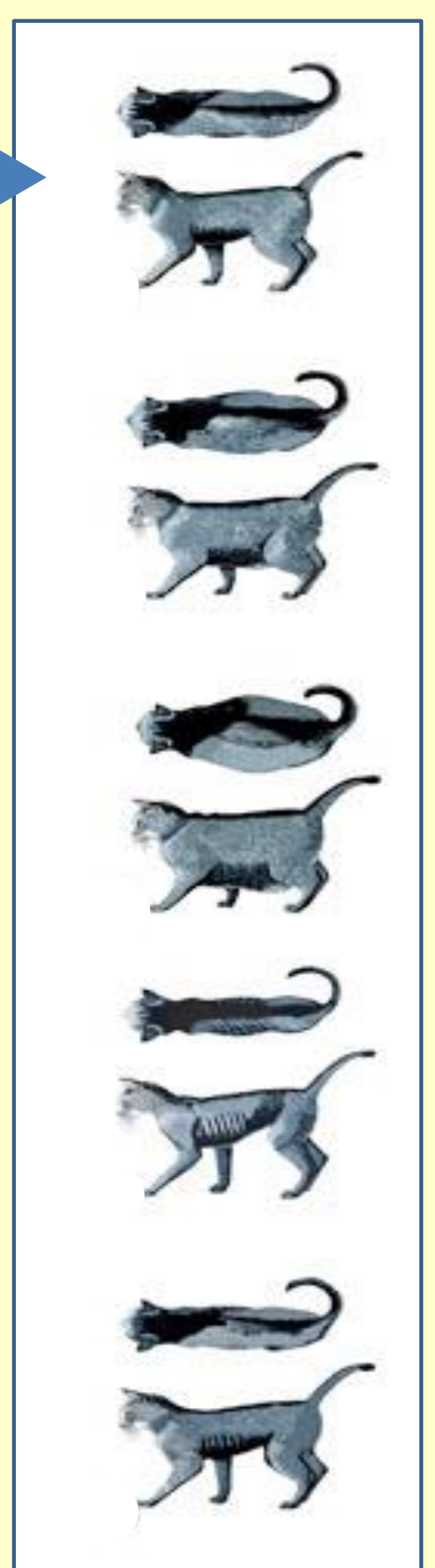


OWNER PERCEPTION OF FELINE BODY CONDITION

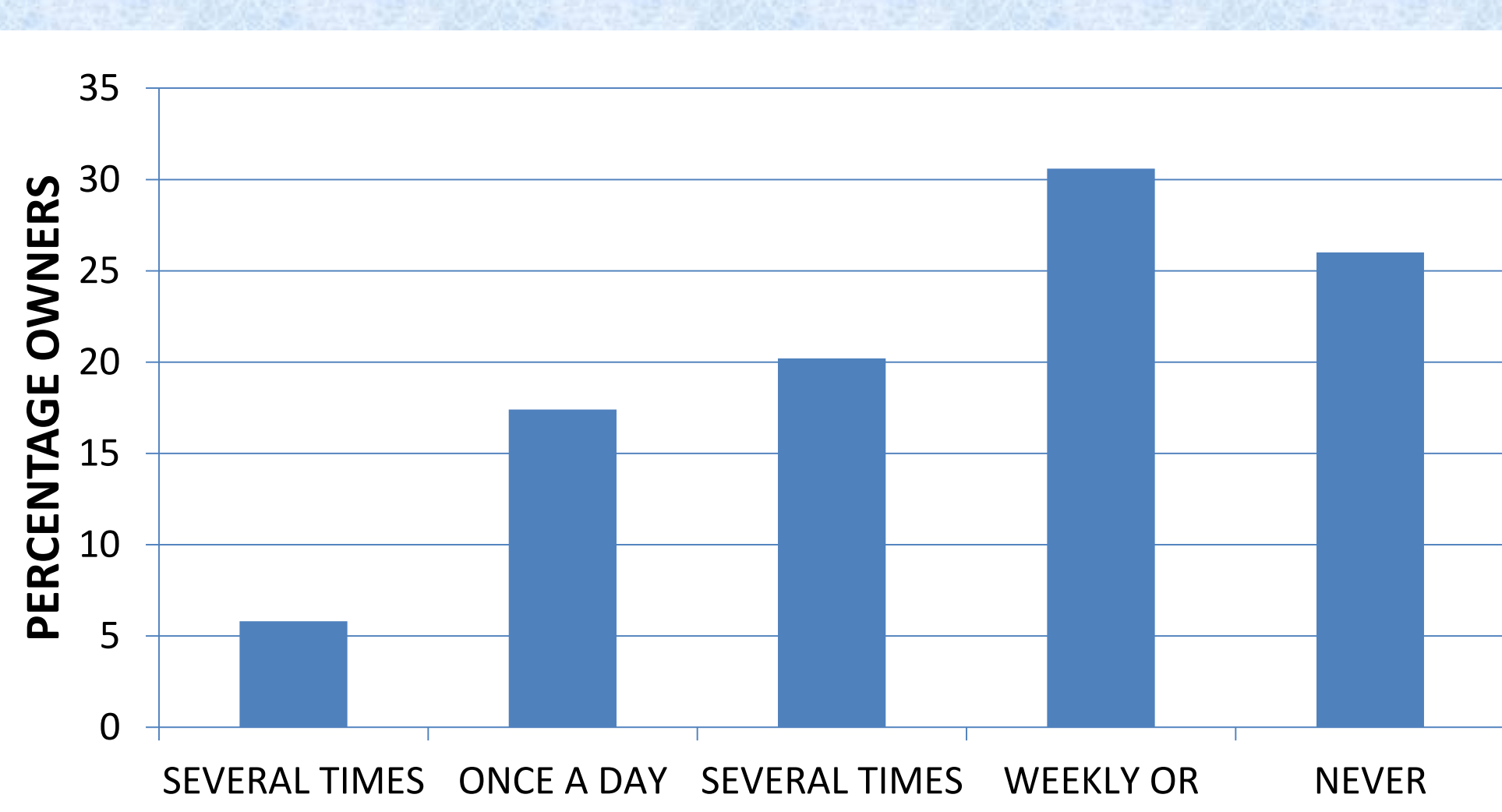
Statements and images from Purina's Body Condition System

91.3% correctly identified healthy body condition image, 4.4% chose image larger than ideal, 2.4% chose thinner than ideal, 2% unsure

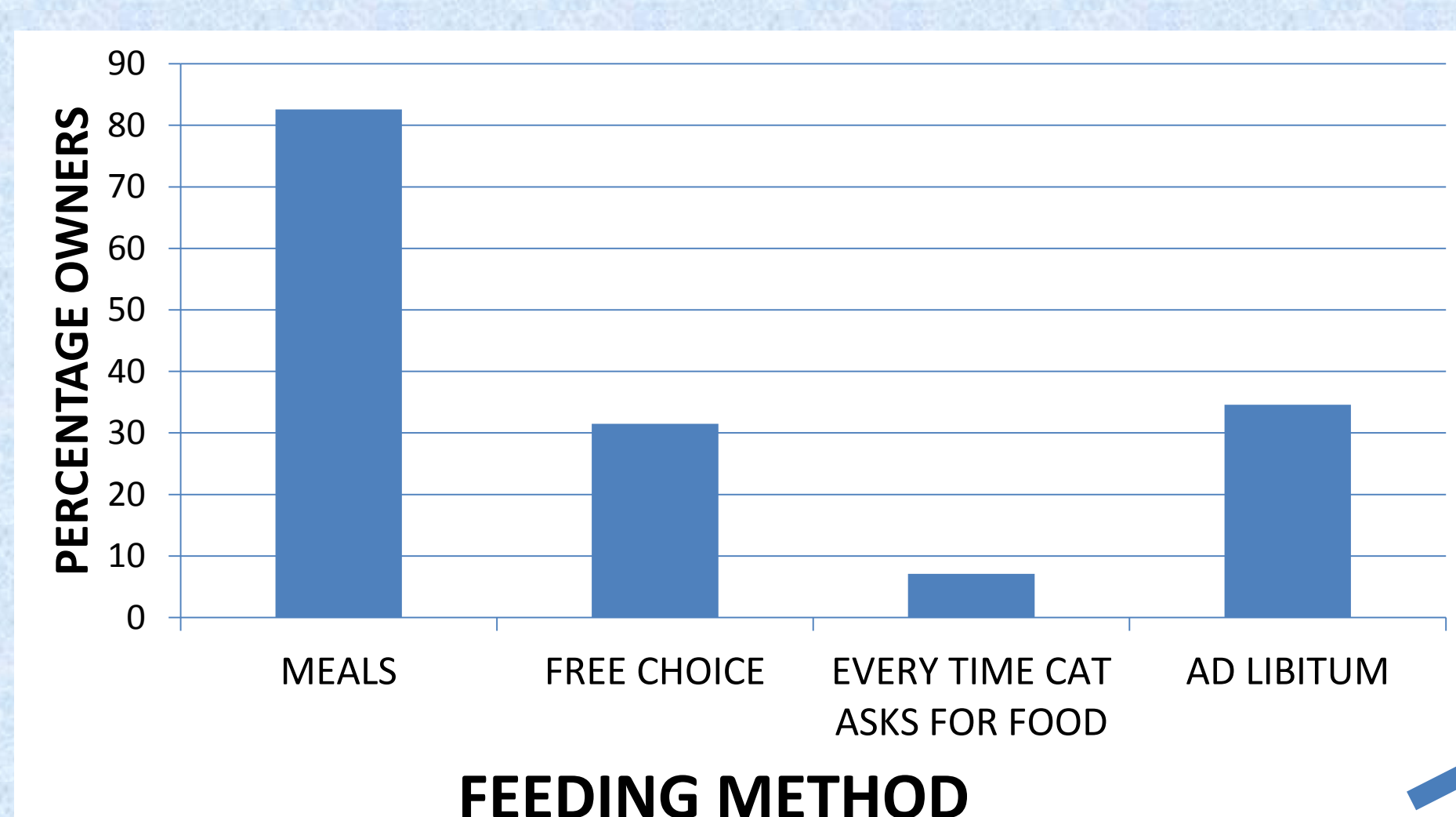
BODY CONDITION SCORE STATEMENT	% OWNERS CORRECTLY SCORE AS TRUE/FALSE
RIBS SHOULD BE VISIBLE	98.9
RIBS SHOULD NOT BE VISIBLE	91.4
RIBS SHOULD BE EASILY FELT BENEATH THE FUR	63.7
RIBS SHOULD BE FELT BY ADDING LIGHT PRESSURE TO FEEL THEM THROUGH THE FUR AND FAT LAYER	83.6
RIBS SHOULD ONLY BE FELT BY ADDING STRONG PRESSURE TO FEEL THEM THROUGH THE FUR AND FAT LAYER	96.9
RIBS SHOULD NOT BE ABLE TO BE FELT AT ALL	96.8
CATS SHOULD HAVE AN OBVIOUS WAIST BEHIND THE RIBS	85.9
CATS SHOULD HAVE AN OBSERVABLE BUT NOT OBVIOUS WAIST BEHIND THE RIBS	82.2
CATS SHOULD HAVE NO WAIST AT ALL BEHIND THE RIBS	93.5



Incorrect owner perception of FBC is a risk factor for feline obesity. These results suggest the majority of owners are able to identify healthy adult FBC at kitten acquisition.



20.2% of owners feed treats several times a week, 34.6% feed their kittens food *ad libitum* and 31.5% by free choice, all of which have previously been found to increase the risk of feline obesity



FEEDING REGIMEN

HOW OWNER MAKES FEEDING DECISIONS	%
EXPERIENCE WITH PAST CATS	48.3
ADVICE FROM REHOMING ORGANISATION	48.3
KITTEN PREFERENCES	22.3
INSTRUCTIONS ON FOOD PACKAGING	11.7
ADVICE FROM VETERINARIAN	8.7
TRIAL AND ERROR	8.0
BOOK/MAGAZINE/INTERNET/TV	5.0
ADVICE FROM FRIEND	2.7

Almost half owners use advice from rehoming organisation: rehoming organisations could be important in correct feline nutrition education.

SUMMARY

- ☛ A substantial proportion of owners feed their kittens in ways that have been previously associated with an increased risk of feline obesity. It remains to be seen whether these feeding methods will be linked to high body condition scores in the current study.
- ☛ In contrast to suggestions from previous studies, it seems that the majority of kitten owners have a good knowledge of what constitutes a healthy FBC.
- ☛ **Identifying early-life risk factors for health and behaviour problems will enable preventative strategies to be designed, in order to reduce relinquishment and improve feline welfare.**