



Six Critical Principles for Advancing Small Animal Nutrition

1

Create a culture where nutrition is valued

- Veterinary healthcare team (VHCT) members at all levels of patient care and administration must accept the fact that 'improving nutrition improves patient outcomes'
- Produce a hospital policy and written guidelines regarding the feeding philosophy and nutrition protocols
- Provide budgets and practical tools that support adequate and appropriate nutrition intervention
- Identify, train and utilise one or more motivated veterinary professionals within the VHCT to act as nutrition 'champions'

2

Redefine VHCT members' roles to include nutrition

- Empower VHCT members to incorporate nutrition
- Secure veterinary nurse (VN)/technician and veterinarian leadership
- Develop team meetings and patient rounds that include nutrition

3

Recognise and diagnose ALL animals at risk of malnutrition

- Assure accountability for malnutrition identification
- Incorporate nutritional assessment into standard assessments
- Include fields for reporting nutritional status in patient records

4

Rapidly implement nutrition interventions and continued monitoring

- Establish policy to implement nutritional support for animals identified as malnourished or at risk of malnutrition
- Create a prompt for a nutrition plan when the nutritional assessment identifies animals as malnourished or at risk of malnutrition in the medical record
- Monitor and record each animal's nutritional support provision and consumption

5

Communicate nutrition care plans

- Leverage electronic records to standardise nutrition documentation
- When present, ensure the recognition of malnutrition as a complicating condition to the primary diagnosis
- Ensure nutrition is included for inpatient nursing care plans
- Include nutrition in patient care discussions

6

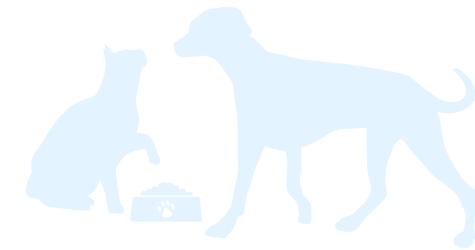
Develop discharge nutrition care and education plan

- Ensure nutrition is included in the discharge plan
- Discuss the nutrition plan with pet caretakers
- Share nutrition plan with any of the animal's allied health care providers
- Leverage the VHCT to ensure the provision of follow-up nutrition support

Principle 1:

Create a culture where nutrition is valued

Your veterinary healthcare team has the knowledge, skills and competences to serve as the expert source of nutrition information and shares a common understanding and agreement about the importance of optimal nutrition for all patients. Your practice considers nutrition status as an essential attribute of medical assessment, monitoring, and care plans, and promotes the consistent conduct of a nutritional assessment of every patient as part of regular workflow procedures. It commits to improving the quality of nutrition care by auditing the outcomes of nutrition-related procedures (Outcome Audit) and how nutrition-related guidelines and protocols are being followed (Process Audit).



Questions for team reflection	What are we doing well?	What could we do better?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Is evidence-based pet nutrition and associated client education a valued part of your organisation's culture? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Define your practice's feeding philosophy. Is this current, appropriate and aligned to written nutrition protocols? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Does your organisation ensure that all members have sufficient and appropriate training and continuing education to be able to serve as the expert source of nutrition information? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Does your organisation ensure sufficient resources and budgetary and practical support for the development of effective nutrition care processes? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Is your team ensuring the clear communication of a nutritional assessment and incorporating this into routine care checklists and processes? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Are all available opportunities to emphasise the importance of nutrition to clients being exploited? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ How do you measure the effectiveness of the systems that are in place to monitor, review and improve nutrition-related patient care? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Are regular clinical audits conducted on the provision, documentation and evaluation of nutrition-related assessment, education, intervention, support and monitoring? 		

Principle 2:

Redefine VHCT members' roles to include nutrition

The essential role that each member of your team plays in achieving improved outcomes through the provision of individual animal nutrition care is recognised and appreciated. Appropriate delegation and the utilisation of all members of your team ensures consistency in and continuity of patient care, optimal dietary advice, and pet caretaker support in executing nutritional recommendations. Utilisation of a veterinary nutrition 'champion' can help to promote the inclusion of nutrition as a standard component of patient care and to reinforce good nutritional practice throughout your clinic.



Questions for team reflection	What are we doing well?	What could we do better?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do all members of your VHCT feel sufficiently knowledgeable, confident and competent to discuss nutrition with pet caretakers? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do all members of your VHCT contribute to the development of practice policies and processes that support the consistent implementation of nutritional assessment and the delivery of nutrition interventions within targeted timeframes? Do all members follow these? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is nutritional care being directed by the veterinarian, with VN collaboration, and being implemented with the help of care assistants and support staff? Are veterinarians being relieved of jobs that can be completed by suitably qualified and competent colleagues? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are compliance responsibilities included in the job description of all team members? This can promote accountability and help to improve adherence. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is nutrition being consistently discussed in patient reviews/rounds? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has your practice identified and trained a member of the team to act as a dedicated veterinary nutrition 'champion'? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the assistance of a Board Certified Veterinary Nutritionist® or an EBVS® European Specialist in Veterinary and Comparative Nutrition being sought when expert advice is needed? 		

Principle 3:

Recognise and diagnose ALL animals at risk of malnutrition

Members of your VHCT actively commit to acknowledging nutrition as the fifth vital assessment and emphasise nutrition as an essential part of animal care. All team members ensure consistent use of nutritional assessment as the fifth vital assessment in the standard clinical examination and record the results of nutritional assessments and subsequent recommendations in medical records and nursing care plans.



Questions for team reflection	What are we doing well?	What could we do better?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Is your practice promoting consistent use of nutritional assessment as the fifth vital assessment in the standard clinical examination of all patients? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Do all members of your VHCT feel sufficiently knowledgeable, confident and competent in conducting a nutritional assessment? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Do your patient medical records capture the results of nutritional assessment? Do automatic triggers prompt a review of nutrition protocol measures and the next steps when nutritional risk factors are entered? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Do your patient medical records capture patients' food consumption and automatically trigger further support and repeat evaluations if suboptimal energy intake is recorded? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Are changes in patients' nutritional risk factors and clinical condition being recorded and communicated to all relevant colleagues? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Does your practice promote pet caretaker completion of a pre-visit questionnaire regarding their pet's usual dietary regime and feeding habits? If so, where and how is this information recorded? 		

Principle 4:

Rapidly implement nutrition interventions and continued monitoring

Delivering optimal nutritional care to patients can be a complex process and is reliant on the effective interprofessional practice and collaboration of your VHCT members, as well as the demonstration of good coordination. Your practice establishes standards of nutritional care that need to be actioned, audited and monitored. All staff within your practice have some level of responsibility to ensure that this happens.



Questions for team reflection	What are we doing well?	What could we do better?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does your practice have nutrition-related algorithms for use in various clinical scenarios? Are your written policies and practices maximising patients' food intake and evaluating and monitoring nutrition plans? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are all animals identified as being malnourished or at risk of malnutrition receiving nutritional support and intervention within 24 hours? How does your organisation ensure that barriers to nutritional intervention are identified and quickly addressed? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is your nursing team empowered to provide appropriate nursing interventions to treat animals that are identified as malnourished or at risk of becoming malnourished? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are your suitably trained personnel assisting VNs with feeding according to the nutritional plan, and in monitoring animals and identifying and recording patients' food intake, elimination, demeanour and behaviour? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are patients' nutritional risk factors, recommendations and plans being accurately recorded, regularly reviewed and updated? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are nil per os (NPO) periods for animals minimised? How do you remain mindful of those identified as NPO? Are feeding schedules altered if a patient is undergoing a procedure or examination at the original feeding time? 		

Principle 5:

Communicate nutrition care plans

Effective communication is fundamental to establishing a reliable and trustful relationship between your VHCT and clients and is an important professional (non-technical) competency for the success of your organisation. Discussing nutrition and emotive topics such as weight management and unconventional feeding can be particularly challenging and uncomfortable for your clients and VHCT. Your organisation ensures the selection of appropriate language and styles of communication, effective information exchange processes, decision-making support and empowerment of all members of the VHCT to engage in appropriate nutrition conversations.

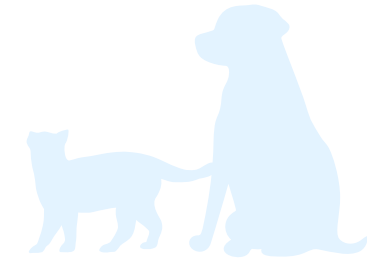


Questions for team reflection	What are we doing well?	What could we do better?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do all members of your team acknowledge the importance of communicating preventive nutrition to caretakers at every pet visit? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is your VHCT leveraging the human-animal bond and considering it fundamental to nutritional conversations? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are all team members proactively questioning caretakers about the usual dietary regime and feeding habits/predilections of their pet(s)? Where possible, is nutritional care and/or recommendations being aligned to these? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is collaboration demonstrated within your VHCT to develop appropriate nutrition plans, including feeding orders, for all patients? Are pet caretakers involved in the dietary decision making process? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is nutrition consistently and accurately being incorporated into patient rounds, handovers of care and ongoing care plans? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are patients' nutritional risk factors, recommendations and plans being effectively communicated to all members of your VHCT and pet caretakers? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How and when are caretakers being kept informed of their pet's care and progress whilst hospitalised in your practice? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you ask your clients for their permission to send updates about their pet (and any appointment and healthcare reminders) via SMS/MMS/email/in-app notifications? 		

Principle 6:

Develop discharge nutrition care and education plan

Many caretakers look to your VHCT to provide expert, non-biased, sound and evidence-based advice on optimal pet nutrition. Educating pet caretakers about appropriate feeding protocols and diet choice helps to enhance pet health, wellbeing and longevity, and preserves the bond between pets and caretakers, potentially resulting in more regular use of veterinary services. Your VHCT focuses on proper nutrition for every patient that presents to your practice and ensures that clients are given clear, specific, verbal and written nutritional advice and recommendations that are clearly documented in patients' medical records.



Questions for team reflection	What are we doing well?	What could we do better?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does your VHCT provide consistent messages and a "one voice" approach to veterinary nutrition? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is collaboration demonstrated within your VHCT to develop appropriate nutritional recommendations and care plans for all pets? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does your VHCT clearly, consistently and accurately document patients' nutritional recommendations within medical records? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are your clients provided with a specific verbal and written summary of their pet's nutritional recommendation, home nutrition care plan and details of follow-up appointments? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does your client care team schedule follow-up appointments with caretakers and emphasise the importance of these? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How and when are nutrition recommendations reinforced to caretakers? Are multiple team members involved? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does your organisation employ systems that prompt the follow-up of nutritional care plans and recommendations? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How is client compliance and concordance assured? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does your organisation employ systems that easily facilitate the booking of future appointments online, via the practice's webpage, social media, online app or alternate platforms? 		