



Mari is a 6 month old calico available for adoption from the Virden Pet Network. See pictures and video online at <http://geocities.com/virdenpetnet>

Gobblers And Grazers

Job is a gobbler. He hoovers up his food in mere seconds, then leans over to "help" with Oomka's.

Oomka is a grazer. She daintily nibbles a bite or two then retires for a few hours of quiet contemplation. When she's ready to graze again, her food is gone thanks to her "helper".

This has been going on since Job, a big black stray, joined the family. Naturally, he's packed on the pounds while petite Oomka maintains a featherweight physique. Their owners have tried to end this supper-time cycle of gobbling and grazing, but to no avail.

Liam, Mari and Shannon are another case. These stray siblings were taken into rescue by the Virden Pet Network. But they had to be separated into different foster homes because Liam hogged everything including the food and all the attention.

Part of the problem in both cases could be dominance. Most cat groupings have an Alpha cat, one who takes charge and demands obedience even from his humans. The Alpha cat in your home is likely the one gobbling up the food and demanding refills.

Combine that dynamic with a lazy indoor lifestyle, eager-to-please owners, and an abundance of good-tasting, low-cost food means obesity in cats is becoming more commonplace. It's even more likely to happen in multicat households where competition for food causes the Alpha cat to steal from the others just because he can.

Your first step should be a vet visit to make sure there are no physical problems driving your gobbler to overeat or your grazer to be so picky. Then your vet can suggest a low cal food and strict feeding plan. (Simply giving a chubby cat less of his regular food rarely works.)

Don't expect to see results quickly. It could take up to a year for your cat to reach his ideal weight. In the meantime, you need to protect your grazer's grub from the greedy gobbler. Try designating separate spaces in your home for each pet complete with their own food dishes, litter boxes, pet beds, etc. This will help prevent the weaker cat from being edged out at chow time. (One rescuer with eight cats, some on different diets, had to assign specific rooms in her home at mealtime to make sure each cat got the right type of food.)

You might also have to become a food cop and stand guard while your cats eat. And as hard as it may be, switching them all over to scheduled mealtimes rather than free feeding will let you control the amount and type of food they both get – because in the end, what's good for the gobbler is good for the grazer.