

Feeding Your Cat for Optimum Health

By Anne Hyle, DVM, CVA, MS
Integrative Medical Center for Animals

Cats are not small dogs. Their nutritional requirements are quite different from one another, because cats are strict carnivores, and dogs are not. Cat's nutritional needs may only be met by consuming a large proportion of animal-based protein. Unlike dogs and humans, cats lack enzymes that would allow them to fully utilize plant proteins. Therefore, they derive much less nutrition from consuming plant-based protein, such as grains and vegetables.

The protein found in dry cat foods is often heavily plant based, containing corn and other grains. The quality of this protein is much lower than that of meat. Plant proteins are much cheaper than meat proteins, allowing pet food companies to have a higher profit margin.

While pet food manufacturers claim to supplement the diets with the missing elements, there are many unknown factors in food.

Nature designed the cat to thrive on animal-based protein, not plant-based protein. In the wild, cats would consume primarily meat and fat with only a small percentage of their diet consisting of carbohydrates. The average dry food contains up to 50 percent carbohydrates, and this can be harmful to your cat's health.

The ideal feline diet should not contain more than 10 percent carbohydrates.

When selecting a food for your cat, look for a muscle meat as the first ingredient,



not meat by-products. Another reason to avoid grains is because corn, soy and wheat have been implicated in food allergies. Soy also contains phyto-estrogens, which have a negative impact on the thyroid gland and may lead to hyperthyroidism in the cat.

Dry food is not the best food for your cat, and even the grain-free dry diets are not the most suitable diet for your feline friend. Cats do not have a strong urge to drink, and this leads to chronic dehydration in the cat that only consumes dry food. Most cats on a dry diet consume as little as half the water of the ones eating canned or raw diets.

There are many diseases in the cat which appear to be related to its diet. Obesity is an extremely common problem in felines and may lead to a number of health issues. The most common problem related to obesity is diabetes. This is an ever-growing problem, and these fat felines are up to four times as likely to develop the disease than their slim counterparts.

Because cats do not utilize carbohydrates for a large portion of their energy, they just store it as fat instead. Often the diets marketed as "light" diets have reduced the fat content, not the carbohydrate content. This is not a healthy alternative for your feline friends. They need the fat, not the carbs!

Other common diseases in the cat are cystitis (bladder infection or inflammation) and bladder stones. Cats that consume dry food tend to have much more concentrated urine than those on wet food. Once again, this is caused by their lack of desire to drink water. The liquid in the canned food helps to form a more dilute urine, which is less likely to yield a lot of crystals. When cats form crystals in the urine, these may form stones, which can lead to a life-threatening urinary obstruction. These cats cannot urinate and quickly become toxic. This can lead to a ruptured bladder, kidney failure and death if not treated on an emergency basis. Treatment requires anesthesia and hospitalization, which may be quite expensive.

Often cat owners believe they must feed some dry food to prevent dental disease. This is not supported by recent studies. Cats do not really chew the dry food very well, because their teeth are intended to eat meat.

Unfortunately, some cats are dry food



Dr. Anne Hyle, Integrative Medical Center for Animals and Vets in the City House Call Veterinary Service

junkies and do not want to eat wet or commercial raw food. Patience is the key with these cats. You may allow your cat to get hungry, but he or she shouldn't go more than 24 hours without eating, because your cat can develop a life-threatening problem called hepatic lipidosis.

Most cats prefer canned food that has been slightly warmed. Sometimes pouring tuna "juice" over the new canned food may encourage your cat to eat it. If your cat loves dry, try sprinkling a little dry food on top of the canned food.

Finally, always transition slowly to avoid stomach upsets. Adding a good probiotic may aid in a smooth transition, as well.

While feeding canned or raw food may be more difficult and more expensive than just pouring dry food into a bowl, it will pay off in the long run. You will have a healthier cat with less health-related issues. This should lead to many happy years with your feline friend. 🐾

Anne Hyle, DVM, CVA, MS, is the owner of Integrative Medical Center for Animals, located at 3646 Birky Street in Sarasota, and Vets in the City Mobile Veterinary Practice. To schedule an appointment, please call 941-954-4771. For additional information about Dry Hyle's veterinary practices, please visit her Web site online at www.HolisticAnimalCare.com.