

A "grain-free" diet can still be high in carbohydrates, it will just contain potatoes or green peas instead of grain. It may also be high in fat.

The fact that a cat food has grain in it doesn't make it bad or unnatural – it's part of their natural diet via their prey. It is also not true that plant ingredients like wheat are common allergens in pets with food allergies.

Unless a cat has kidney or liver disease, in which case lower protein diets are recommended, higher protein and lower carbohydrate levels are generally better. The problem

is, you have no way to tell by reading a pet food label how much fat, protein or carbohydrate is in the food. **What you see on the label are maximum and minimum amounts, not precise quantities.** In fact, it is impossible to tell by reading a pet food label how high quality the food is, because pet food labels are not designed to give us the information we need to make good choices. The information the FDA and USDA require on labels says very little about the quality of the food.

Most OTC diets, both canned and dry, don't have enough fatty acids or antioxidants in them. These nutrients are not listed on the label at all. Pet food stores sell some better quality diets, but it's difficult for a consumer to tell good from bad and many are not nearly as healthy as the fancy marketing campaigns make you think they are.

In contrast, with a high quality pet food, exact nutrient content is available on the company's website. The way veterinarians evaluate diets is by a scientific analysis on a dry matter basis. This is only available from companies that do testing and scientific analysis of their diets. We don't use the information on the government-required label because it's inaccurate and misleading.

Watch our YouTube video on How to Choose a Good Pet Food to learn about some of the ways manufacturers can fudge labels and ingredient lists to make their food seem better than it really is.

Visit our website or youtube and watch our nutrition videos to learn more about protein sources and evaluating pet food label. There are two videos, each about 10 minutes long. The links are:

How to Choose a Good Food

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xzdjjug0SzM&feature=plcp>

Protein in Pet Foods

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqBJBK-R7Cc&feature=plcp>

OBESITY and DIABETES

The second most common health problem in cats, after dental disease, is obesity. About half the cats in the U.S. are overweight or obese, and this number has gone up 71% since 2005.

Unlike dogs and people, who feel full when they have eaten enough calories, cats feel full when they have eaten enough protein. When eating a diet lower in protein and higher in carbohydrate or fat, they tend to overeat because it takes a lot of food to get enough protein to achieve satiety – that full feeling of having eaten enough.

Most cat owners, unless advised otherwise, feed OTC dry diets by leaving the dish out all the time. Constant availability of high carbohydrate diets leads straight to obesity for many cats. Just 10 extra kibbles of dry food per day can cause 4 pounds of weight gain by age 10. **Food should always be measured and metered out so that pets don't overeat.**

It's difficult to create a dry food nugget with minimal carbohydrates because carbs are needed to create a dry food that holds together and doesn't get rancid. Canned diets, on the other hand, can be very low in carbohydrate. The dry versions of prescription "low carb" diets for cats contain about 15% carbohydrate while the canned versions contain only 5%.



Along with obesity rates, diabetes cases in cats are soaring. Diabetes is an inherited disease but it often will never develop if a cat is maintained at a healthy weight. The more obese a cat becomes, the more likely it will become diabetic. The risk is highest in middle aged cats 8-12 years old, and males are affected twice as often as females. High protein, low-carb diets are used to treat both obesity and diabetes. Again, you cannot determine what cat foods fit this profile from a pet food label.

WET or DRY?

Some cat owners feed only canned food or canned food in addition to dry. This has drawbacks. It's more expensive to feed canned food and not as convenient. Dry food is easy and it doesn't dry out or spoil. There are also concerns about toxic chemicals leaching from the cans into the food when the diet is fish-based.

Over-the-counter canned diets usually contain lots of protein, but it is poor quality protein that is poorly digested and creates a lot of waste products for the liver and kidneys to handle. Young cats deal with these diets OK, but older cats or ones with kidney or liver problems do not. An older cat with failing kidneys will die of kidney failure years sooner if eating OTC canned diets like Friskies, Fancy Feast or 9 Lives. It's difficult to switch an older cat off these diets if they've been eating them all their lives, even when we know it would be life-saving if we could do so.



PRESCRIPTION DIETS

Notice that we have so far not recommended that you feed an over-the-counter food at all. If we had our way, every pet would be eating a prescription or therapeutic diet. (Hill's has copyrighted the word "prescription" for pet food, so other manufacturers use the word "therapeutic" for their veterinary-specific diets.) These diets are designed to address specific problems such as weight management, arthritis or dental disease.

OTC diets are required by law to provide nutrition that fits within certain parameters. These parameters don't allow for nutrients to be added in therapeutic amounts – extra fatty acids to treat arthritis for example. Prescription diets are different. They can legally contain amounts of things, such as that fish oil for arthritis, that are high enough to treat diseases. You may see the words "contains glucosamine" on a bag of food at the pet store but the amount of glucosamine in an OTC diet cannot legally be enough to have a therapeutic effect on your pet.

Therapeutic diets can also contain less of some ingredients than is legally required for an OTC diet, such as lower amounts of fat or fiber to treat certain digestive disorders.

Almost every cat could benefit from one or more of these strategies. What you feed your cat makes a huge difference to his or her life expectancy and quality of life. Therapeutic diets have been clinically proven to have health benefits, with research and quality control behind them. No matter how good the ads sound, most brands do not provide this level of nutrition.

Prescription diets have been tested and approved by the FDA just like drugs. They are made in the company's own facility so they have control over things like ingredient testing, cleanliness and processing. Nothing goes in the food that isn't on the label and nothing is on the label that isn't in the food. They have their own laboratory on-site so they can test each batch of ingredients and each batch of finished food to make sure it meets their standards. The facilities are inspected and are open for tours by veterinarians and veterinary technicians. Their nutrition research is published and the results of extensive food trials and testing on live dogs and cats are utilized when they formulate their diets.

If we had our choice, we would have every patient on a prescription diet! There is no pet that couldn't benefit from at least one of the extra benefits that high quality prescription diets provide.

HOW TO FEED A CAT TO REDUCE STRESS



Good nutrition for cats is not only about what to feed but also how and when you deliver that food.

Cats are natural-born nibblers

A cat's metabolism is designed to take in small amounts of food frequently throughout the day. It takes eight 35-calorie mice per day to feed an average-sized cat. This is approximately equal to ten kibbles of dry food. You may think it's normal for a cat to sit by a bowl and eat until it is empty, but cats normally prefer to graze. They eat a few mouthfuls of food and walk away, intending to come back later. Walking away from a food after a few bites doesn't mean your cat doesn't like her food or is being fussy! This is normal cat behavior.

Meal feeding twice a day can cause cats to overeat, and/or to gulp their food and regurgitate. It is also stressful for the cat, since it goes against their normal, instinctive behavior. Overeating at meals is especially common when there are multiple cats in the household competing with each other.

Cats aren't social eaters

Humans like to eat in groups, so many pet owners assume that cats do, too. Pet owners commonly feed multiple cats in the same location. In fact, some cats will eat poorly because of the anxiety associated with being forced to eat in a group, while others will overeat. Even cats that are socially compatible in other situations prefer to eat alone.

At-home advice for cat owners

- Weigh or measure the amount of food you feed each day.
- Divide the food up into multiple portions. Feed small, frequent meals.
- Deliver the food in ways that give the cat more control over food acquisition. Food puzzles or hiding small amounts of food in multiple locations helps cats to feel they are hunting for their dinner and burns



calories. Playing with your cat before meals also helps to simulate hunting and reduce stress.

- Cats feel safer at higher elevations, so feed cats from a counter, cat tree or perch when possible. Each platform should be small enough that only one cat can eat there at a time. Quiet locations are best.

- Feed cats separately. Establish multiple feeding stations. Automatic feeders that only open for the cat whose microchip or RFD tag has been programmed in can keep cats from eating each other's food. Some are designed to hold an ice pack to keep canned food from spoiling during the day.

