

# FEEDING YOUR KITTEN



Dogs and people are omnivores but cats are carnivores. They have a higher requirement for protein and their metabolism is different. As they've come to appreciate these differences, veterinary nutritionists are recommending cats be fed differently than we have in the past. We'd like to dispel some myths about cat nutrition and give you some guidance as to what to feed your cat.

## HOW DOES A CAT CHOOSE ITS FOOD?

Taste and smell are not necessarily the primary factors when cats choose what food they want to eat. Cats often like or dislike a food because of "mouth feel," which has to do with the size and shape of a dry food nugget or the texture and consistency of canned food. It's how the nugget lines up in the mouth, and the size and shape of it. Some cats will only eat paté type canned foods and others prefer morsels in gravy or slices.

Offer a variety of good-quality diets, in different sizes, shapes and forms

It's no accident that pet food companies each make their dry food nuggets in different shapes. They want your cat to learn to get accustomed to the size and shape of their proprietary nugget, so that your cat won't want to eat anything else.

What we want you to do is teach your kitten to be flexible when he or she is young. It will be less likely a fixation with just one kind of food develops. Every food you try should be from our list of recommended foods and all of them should be kitten foods, but experiment and change it up!

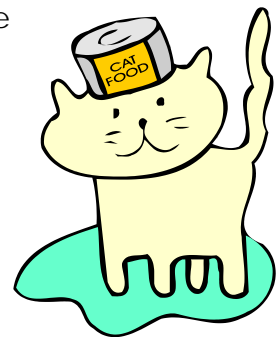
## WET or DRY?

Some cat owners feed only canned food or canned food in addition to dry. This has benefits and 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.

However, there are several medical conditions that make canned food a better choice, including bladder disease, kidney disease and dental problems. Canned foods contain more water, so they help keep cats with kidney disease better hydrated. A more watery urine is better for controlling crystals in the urine, so they don't form stones. Diabetic cats also do much better on canned food diets.

Getting your kitten used to eating some canned food helps to ensure they are willing to eat it when they need to, even if you limit it to the occasional treat once your cat is an adult.

Over-the-counter canned cat foods are often the lowest-quality diets. Cats need a lot of protein in their diets, and 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.

- Feed at least some canned food right from the beginning so your cat is accustomed to it. That will make it easier to switch entirely over to canned food should you need to later in life.
- You should choose a high-quality canned kitten food though, not a cheap adult one.

## WHAT WE RECOMMEND YOU FEED YOUR KITTEN

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Good nutrition is essential to good health. In humans, proper diet can prevent breast and colon cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and many other diseases. The same is true for our pets - the better the diet, the lower the risk of disease.

**Want a healthy pet? Feed a GOOD FOOD!**

Feed the best food you can afford to feed. Cheap foods have inferior ingredients, poor quality control, are not as digestible, and may contain excesses or deficiencies of various nutrients. The better the food, the more digestible it is, so the less you have to feed. Sometimes more expensive brands are actually cheaper to use because you feed less. You may need to feed three times as much of a poor quality food to get the same amount of nutrition.

On the other hand, **many expensive pet store diets actually provide very poor nutrition**, despite their fancy marketing. Over a dozen brands, including Blue Buffalo, Taste of the Wild, Rachel Ray Nutrish, Fromm's, Zignature, and others, have been linked to heart failure in dogs. **Grain-free diets are especially problematic.**

There is a lot of research that goes into a good brand of dog or cat food. We are still learning about the nutritional needs of our companion animals, and only the companies that are keeping up with the latest findings have incorporated them into their foods.

- 1) We want a diet manufactured in the company's own plant, not in a giant production facility that makes diets for dozens of different brands. This ensures the company has control of the ingredients, the processing and the cleanliness of the plant.
- 2) We want one formulated by a nutritionist – that means a PhD in animal nutrition or a veterinarian board-certified in small animal nutrition. Nutrition is way too complicated to formulate on paper from a chart.
- 3) We want ingredient testing before those ingredients go into the food – for purity, for heavy metals, for fat and water content, for fiber balance and a host of other things.
- 4) We want the company to perform and publish nutritional research.
- 5) We want feeding trials, where the food is fed to live dogs or cats who are tested and monitored for things like heart disease and kidney failure.

**Want more info? Watch the nutrition videos on our YouTube channel, BFVCTV!**

There are only four pet food companies that do all this. We used to give you a list of other brands we thought were acceptable, but we have cut way back because so many diets are problematic.

## PET FOODS WE REALLY LIKE

• Hill's Healthy Advantage • Science Diet • Purina Pro Plan • Eukanuba • Royal Canin

## PET FOODS WE THINK PROVIDE POOR QUALITY NUTRITION (PLEASE DON'T BUY THESE!)

• 9 Lives • Alley Cat • Bench and Field • Deli Cat • Diamond • Fancy Feast • Generics of any kind • Kirkland • Kozy Kitten • Old Roy • Sprout • Whiskas

## DIETS WE WANT YOU TO STAY AWAY FROM

• Everything else!

## PET FOOD COMPANY MYTHS

People are heavily influenced by marketing and PR when it comes to pet foods. Words like "no corn," "grain-free," "natural," "premium," "human grade" and "holistic" are thrown around with abandon yet mean very little as far as determining the quality of a pet food. Examples:

1) A pet food that says "holistic" on the label can just as easily be made in a dirty facility with inferior ingredients as one that does not.

2) When pet foods are analyzed, sometimes the ingredients don't even match what is on the label. A food that says chicken on the label can have no poultry DNA in it at all because some other meat was substituted instead, and the consumer will have no idea. One study showed that 40% of OTC diets have one or more meats in the food that are not listed on the label.

3) "Grain-free" is a marketing term that fails to give you any information about the actual amount of carbohydrate in the food. Glucose is glucose and fiber is fiber – it doesn't matter to the body whether it came from rice or potato or corn. The pet food company just wants you to think it matters so you'll buy their food! Furthermore, some ingredients in grain-free diets have been shown to cause problems. Green peas, for example, can cause bladder stones.

4) **If you've been told by someone in a pet store that veterinarians don't have training in nutrition, or we get kickbacks from Hill's for selling Science Diet, you've been lied to.** Nutrition and health are intimately connected – of course we learned about nutrition! If you've been told that Hill's food is bad because it contains corn and fillers or it's been bought out and is no longer high quality, you've been exposed to the food industry's version of propaganda. Much of the information in pet food marketing, from a scientific standpoint, doesn't even make sense.

5) One last concern consumers have typically involves pet food company reputations. Many times people think they are buying a hand crafted, high quality diet from a small company that cares about their pet, but this is rarely true. Most pet foods are made by giant corporations. For example, the brands Diamond, Kirkland, Natural Balance, Wellness, Canidae, Chicken Soup and Premium Edge are all made in the same facility. This is why, when there is a pet food recall, it's common for many brands



to

be involved.

## CATS AND CARBOHYDRATES

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.

It is not true, despite what you may have read on the internet, that cats cannot digest carbohydrates, nor is it true that no cat should ever eat any carbohydrates. Carbs are not just empty calories, either. The carbohydrate portion of the diet includes beneficial fiber, which helps to prevent both diarrhea and constipation, and promotes healthy gut bacteria.

In the wild, cats catch and eat prey. Prey species have plants and grains in their digestive tracts, which cats eat and digest. Glucose and glycogen are carbohydrates every species uses to power their muscles, brain and tissues, so cats ingest these simple carbohydrate molecules with every animal they eat. A mouse is 58% protein but also contains fat, carbohydrate, vitamins and minerals.

One study showed when cats are able to choose the constituents of their diet, they will aim for 52% protein, 36% fat and 12% carbohydrates. They don't choose zero carbs!

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. 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.

**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.**

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

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=Xzdjuq0SzM&feature=plcp>

### **Protein in Pet Foods**

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

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 *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.

The following recommendations are our personal opinions, based on the reputation of the company, the level of its research and quality control, and the associations between certain foods and nutritionally related diseases. Remember, there is a big difference between **adequate** nutrition and **optimum** nutrition.

### **PET FOODS WE REALLY LIKE**

• Hill's Healthy Advantage • Science Diet • Purina Pro Plan • Eukanuba • Royal Canin

### **PET FOODS WE THINK ARE PRETTY GOOD**

• Iams • Purina ONE

### **PET FOODS WE THINK PROVIDE POOR QUALITY NUTRITION (PLEASE DON'T BUY THESE!)**

• 9 Lives • Alley Cat • Deli Cat • Diamond • Fancy Feast • Generics of any kind • Kirkland • Kozy Kitten • Sprout • Whiskas

### **DIETS WE WANT YOU TO STAY AWAY FROM**

• **Everything else!**

### RAW DIETS

There is no nutritional advantage to feeding raw, regardless of what you may find on the internet. These diets, whether frozen, freeze-dried or raw, all expose your pet to bacterial contamination. Salmonella, E. coli, Listeria and several other exotic diseases you've probably never heard of have been found in raw diets. Even worse, both handling these pet foods and cleaning up your pet's stools exposes you to these infections as well – even if your pet's stools look normal. No commercial raw diets meet the above criteria. Homemade raw diets made from recipes you find in books or online are nearly always lacking essential nutrients.

### **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. 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.

