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VETERINARY
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Your Special Cat's Diet

Good nutrition is vital to good health! But what is a good diet for a cat? The media, the Internet, and the pet food industry are full of conflicting advice. **We advise feeding meat-based, canned cat food.**

Cats are obligate carnivores and require meat-based diets. Cats are designed to eat a diet with abundant, high quality, animal protein. We see this design in the structure of their digestive systems, the kinds of enzymes they have, and differences in their metabolism. Cats require more essential amino acids and more B vitamins than dogs or people do. Plant sources of protein that work well for us are nutrient poor for cats. Studies of feral cats show that they eat more than 90% of their diet in prey items. They do not eat grains, vegetables or fruit and our cats don't need these foods either.

Cats need water with their food. Cats are also designed to get most of their water from their meat-based diet. They lack a strong thirst drive and cats who eat only dry food tend to be mildly dehydrated. Dehydration is a worry because urinary tract disease is common in cats. Dry food cats may drink more water from their bowls, but they consume less water than cats fed canned food diets. Cats require fresh water and may prefer glass or metal water dishes, water that moves, and water that is distant from their food dish or litter box.

Cats have problems with dry and high carbohydrates diets. No matter what the manufacturers tell you, it is impossible to make a dry food that is low in carbohydrates. Dry foods may be made without grains, but it must have a carbohydrate source like yams, potatoes, or other vegetable. While grains are not good for cats, there is no scientific evidence that high carbohydrate vegetables are better. Free feeding of high carbohydrate foods may increase risk of serious and common illnesses like obesity, diabetes mellitus, inflammatory bowel disease, and pancreatitis. These conditions, in turn, increase the risk of urinary tract disease, joint disease, skin disorders and decreased quality of life.

Cats should be meal-fed rather than "free choice." In the wild, cats spend a lot of time and energy hunting food. Of course, they are not always successful. Our cats still may do lots of hunting and food-seeking behavior, but if they are always successful, they will usually become overweight. In addition to regulating how much food they eat, we must provide our cats with other interesting things to do.

Learn to read labels on the cans of food. The protein and fat content labels may not be very accurate, but the ingredients list is revealing. The first two or three ingredients should be some kind of meat, aside from water or broth necessary for processing. Many people prefer foods without any grains like rice, barley, corn, wheat, oats, but there should certainly not be more than one. Cats do not need fruits or vegetables and these are simply fillers from the cat's point of view. For information on the protein content of canned foods, look at <http://binkyspage.tripod.com/CanFoodNew.html>

Dry food and dental health. Does dry food make for healthier teeth? Recent research suggests that this is not so important as we used to believe. The best way to maintain dental health in pets is to clean their teeth at home

(ask us for handouts and demonstrations). We believe that the general health benefits from canned foods outweigh the dental advantage of dry foods.

Raw meat diets: We do not recommend raw meat diets, because raw meat can so easily transmit parasites and dangerous bacteria to pets and people.

It can be a challenge to get a dry food addict to eat canned food. A gradual, patient, approach is needed.

