



What is in pet food...

I am certain that most of you feel like I do, meaning that with all the pet food recalls from the past and present we are at a point that we just do not know what the heck to feed our pets anymore.

When the food recalls appeared all over the news 3 years ago (if my memory serves me well, it was in 2007) people were completely at a loss as to what to feed

their pets.

Well that was in 2007, but how about now.

Not much has changed, has it!

How about the recalls in the present time, the ones that happen behind the curtain and nobody knows about it, the news that should be news, but nothing comes out on the news, at least not right away!

We as rescuers get the inside scoop and find out about it, but unfortunately the information doesn't reach all pet owners as it should.

For example in the past two months or so I have received recall alerts regarding Iams, Eukanuba, Wellness, being contaminated with salmonella, several prescription diets for both dogs and cats were also recalled, none of these recalls have reached the news until probably last week, before that there were no warnings to consumers anywhere, not at pet stores or supermarkets and neither at vets offices, my own vet had no clue that prescription diet he sold was contaminated, until they received an e-mail from me!

Unfortunately pet stores and supermarkets just pull the food off the shelves and that is that, whomever bought the food and fed it to their pet(s) it is obvious that is not a concern for the stores that sell it and is neither a concern to the pet food manufacturers that make it.

Fact is that these companies are just selling a product, they are about making money, and they can care less about what is good for our pets, if they did, these recalls that kill pets and make pets sick will just NOT HAPPEN to begin with!

That said, being a pet owner myself and a shelter manager, it is my job to look after my own pets, as well as the little ones in our shelter and all of you wonderful pet owners and caretakers.

This is the reason why I have begun to do extensive research on pretty much every single brand of pet food on the market, where is it made and what the ingredients are, etc.

Even though this article has been written with cats in mind, it all applies for dogs as well.

Although dogs are a bit different in what they require nutritionally, label wise it is basically the same. There is always one thing that cat or dog owners need to know and that is that putting a little thought into what we feed our pets can and will pay big over their lifetime.

Good quality food and meeting your pet dietary needs will avoid many serious and expensive illnesses.

In other words it will keep the vet away.

So let's start.

To begin what is most important is to know what a cat requires to fully meet his/her dietary needs.

Since cats are strict carnivores they need Animal-Based Protein, meaning that they need to get their nutritional needs met by the consuming large amounts of animal-based proteins such as MEAT.

Plant-based proteins such as grains have NO nutritional value, not to mention the fact that cats cannot process grains as well as meat.

Cats have a physiological decrease in the ability to utilize carbohydrates due to the lack of specific enzymatic pathways that are present in other mammals, and the lack a salivary enzyme called amylase.

Protein in dry food, is heavily plant-based, is not equal in quality to the protein in canned food, which is meat-based.

If we look at food labels it may appear that protein percentages are higher in dry food than can food, well not the case.

If we look at cats in their natural environment, you would probably be never going to see a wild cat hunting biscuits across the plains of Africa or dehydrating a mouse and topping it with corn meal gluten souffle!

In the wild cats eat high protein, high-moisture content, meat-based diets, with a moderate level of fat and only 6% of their diet consists of carbohydrates.

Because cats are carnivores as we mentioned above, they have great ability to produce glucose from protein, but have great difficulty processing carbohydrates.

This is because their liver has what is called normal hexokinase activity, but it doesn't have what is called glucokinase, for that reason cats are limited in their ability to process excess glucose and store glycogen, therefore that glucose is going to hang around for a long while and eventually becomes fat.

In addition, unlike humans, protein is the cause of insulin release in cats, therefore they have adapted to high protein diets by being insulin resistant. This maintains blood glucose during periods of fasting which is great for cats that live in the wild, but not so great for house cats that are only on a dry food diet.

Dry food or kibble as is called is cheap, easy and fast, but bottom line is not good for cats nor is what they need.

So how do we read pet food ingredient labels?

1- Words such as "Premium or Natural" doesn't necessarily mean that the food is of high quality and that is good for your pet!

2- Look for the word MEAT as the first ingredient.

This will be listed as "Turkey", "Chicken", "Beef", "Salmon" etc.

NOT "chicken meal", or "chicken by-product meal" or "chicken by-products", or "chicken broth".

The term "meal" usually means that the meat had been cooked for a long time at very high temperatures and is lower quality than meat that has not

been as heavily processed.

By-products can include intestines, feet, feathers, egg shells, you name it, it can contain it.

3- Grains should be absent or, at least the amount should be minimum. GRAINS should NEVER be listed as the first three ingredients.

Corn and wheat are thought to be common ingredients however they are the main cause of food allergies in pets and digestive problems, therefore it is best to focus on foods that use other grains such as rice, brown rice, oats, etc.

4- Soy contains phytoestrogens and soy also negatively influences the thyroid gland. Given how common hyperthyroidism is in the cat, soy has no business being in cat food. Unfortunately, soy is a common ingredient used by pet food manufacturers because it enhances their profit margin.

5- Avoid foods listing "liver" as a first ingredient. Liver is very nutritious n meat therefore it should be present in small amounts.

However it should never be the first ingredient as it is very high in vitamin A and D and you don't want to feed too much of those vitamins to you feline.

6- "Indoor only" is just a marketing gimmick, now days food companies got creative to once again raise more profit by tricking pet owners.

Whether your cat lives indoors or outdoors his/her nutritional needs are the same, just keep in mind that cats did not stop being obligate carnivores just because we put a roof over their heads!!!

7- Another marketing ploy is that Hill's is now substituting the word "corn" with "maize". Well I hate to brake it to you but Maize is corn and since this company is well aware of the fact that consumers are becoming more savvy about pet food ingredients, they have decided to try to disguise the corn in their diets by calling it "maize".

8- Preservatives are ingredients that we need to pay close attention to as they contain BHA, BHT, and ethoxyquin that are considerate un-safe.

There is a very strong connection between what our pets are fed and life-threatening diseases that affects them, so pay attention.

Diabetes: Is very serious and difficult to manage.

It is common in cats that are strictly on a dry food diet.

This is what happens, inappropriate high level of carbohydrates in dry food destroys the blood sugar level of an obligate carnivore.

The blood sugar level rises significantly upon ingestion of dry food.

With chronic hyperglycemia (high blood sugar) the insulin producing cells in the pancreas burns out and leads to diabetes.

Kidney Failure, is probably the number one cause of mortality in cats.

Dry food does not contain much moisture therefore a cat that is on a dry food diet only tends to be dehydrated or can suffer chronic

dehydration which will lead to kidney failure.

Cystitis and bladder-kidney stones and UTI's.

Cats that are on a dry food diet have more highly concentrated urine, this means that a higher concentration of stone-forming crystals will be present in the urine.

This increases the chance of producing life-threatening bladder stones. When crystals are formed they act like sandpaper on the bladder wall, this can lead to very painful cystitis.

Cystitis can lead to inappropriate urination and stones can cause a fatal rupture of the bladder.

Important Note:

Any cat that is repeatedly entering the litter box but not voiding any urine is in need of IMMEDIATE medical attention, specially if the cat is a male.

Cats eating canned food are more appropriately hydrated, and therefore, have more dilute urine.

All too often veterinarians prescribe special diets, for urinary tract infections, stones and crystals, contrary to what is often believed, most if not all, of these so-called "prescription" diets not formulated for optimal health of a carnivore. Many of these diets contain soy, corn and wheat, soy being primarily not the best ingredient in a cats diet.

These diets are too often very high in carbohydrates.

Many of them also contain by-products as main ingredients and the one and only source of protein.

Many of the prescribed feline lower urinary tract diets are formulated to make the urine acidic but it is believed that these low magnesium, acidifying diets may actually promote painful cystitis as well as calcium oxalate stone formation and can also lead to hypokalemia (low potassium in the blood) which can cause or promote kidney disease.

Please note that there are many factors which determine the pH of urine and only one of them is diet, stress and low water consumption are among others.

With regard to dry food and urinary tract health, aside from the lack of water in this type of diet, there is also a correlation between the consumption of a high carbohydrate diet and the formation of struvite crystals because carbohydrate diets promote an alkaline urine.

Veterinarians often prescribe Hill's Prescription dry c/d and x/d for urinary tract infections, again, these diets are only ten percent water and contain a high level of species-inappropriate ingredients and questionable preservatives.

They are also very high in carbohydrates with dry c/d containing 42 percent of its weight as carbohydrates.

I will like to add to this section , separate from the nutrition fact, that ANY cat urinating inappropriately should be check by a veterinarian, cystitis, bladder stones and UTI's are probably the # 1 cause of pets not using the litter box.

Cystitis is very painful, your cat is not using the litter box because he or she associates the pain with the litter box, not because he or she is getting back at you for something or is making.

Any pet with a litter box issue should be taken to see a veterinarian for proper examination and a urinalysis should be performed immediately it could be a behavior problem sure, but most of the time it is not.

Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD):

Studies show that IBD is common cause of vomiting and diarrhea in cats. Too often these cats are treated with a high level of steroids and a so-called "prescription" DRY diet.

I feel very strongly that this "prescription dry diet" should be re-evaluated as studies show that a high number of cats suffering from IBD had shown dramatic improvement when ALL dry food was removed from their diet and were only put on high quality wet food only.

Obesity:

By now you already know that obligate carnivores are designed to meet their energy needs with a high protein and that dry food carbohydrates are minimally used once in our cat(s) belly.

You also know that some of the carbohydrates in dry food are used for energy and that it is not used for energy is converted and stored into fat.

Well the so called "Light" diets that are on the market today they target the fat content as the nutrient to be decreased, but in doing so, pet food manufacturers have increased the grain fraction, by doing this all they are doing is leading to a higher level of carbohydrates.:(

This is the reason of why many obese pets eating these so called "Light" diets are still obese and do not loose any weight. These so called "Light" diets are to say the least the most inappropriate diets on the market and should be flat out taken off the shelves.

Hepatic Lipidosis (Fatty Liver Disease):

This is the most common metabolic liver disease of cats.

Overweight cats that go longer than 48 hours without eating, are in danger

of developing this serious and dangerous, sometimes fatal disease.

Feeding a high-protein, low-carbohydrate diet helps keep cats at healthy body weight.

Dental Disease:

Long-standing claims that cats have less dental disease when they are fed dry food versus canned food are highly overrated, inaccurate, and are not supported by recent studies.

First, dry food is hard, but brittle, and merely shatters with little to no abrasive effect on the teeth. Second, a cat's jaws and teeth are designed for tearing and shearing, not biting down on dry kibble, third, many cats swallow the majority of their dry food whole.

And Fourth, a meat-based diet results in an acidic oral environment which may actually prevent some forms of dental disease.

Feline Asthma/Allergic: Airway Disease:

Many respiratory symptoms in cats such as coughing and difficulty breathing subside considerably and sometimes even completely disappear, when cats are placed on grain-free canned food.

This is because symptoms could be related to your cats reacting to storage mites or cockroach antigens that are present in dry foods, or they may have been reacting to the gluten (protein fraction) part of the grains that are present in dry foods.

Sadly, many cats exhibiting debilitating lung disease are simply put on an immunosuppressive dose of steroids, while still being fed an inappropriate diet. While steroids are necessary in many cases, they are not addressing the root of the problem which can, in many cases, be an allergy to proteins in the form of species-inappropriate grains, and insect antigens. Steroids can cause diabetes in cats, it also lowers the immune system making pets vulnerable to infections from viruses, bacteria, and fungal agents so it is very important to make sure you have ruled out diet as a cause of the cat's respiratory problem, before putting you cat on steroids.

Most of you cat parents already know what your cat wants and demands in more ways than one and as good cat parents that we are we obey!LOL

But for the sake of our children we must disobey for once, specially when it comes to those felines that want nothing to do with eating wet food.

Cats often like all that is junk and that is bad for them.

And then of course we just do not only have feline protest we also hear pet owners say: My cats has been on cat food all his/her life and is in perfect health!

All I can say about the statement above is:

That cats are pros at masking disease, and usually by the time they show signs of anything any illness is too far advance.

Anyway, if you have one of those pets that just likes dry food, below are a few

tips to transition your dry food children to eat wet food.

The first thing you will need is to be very patient.

Yes patience is the key.

The transition must be done gradually and slowly, transitioning you cat to eat wet food may take a few weeks or may take up to 3 months or longer.

Of course it all depends on each cat and their "cattitude".Some cats will say: Well finally something good for dinner at last!

Other will say: What the heck are you giving me and even try to burry it the food as when they go potty.: (

In some cases you will need to use hunger to help with the transition. I personally do not advise for the cat not to eat for 24 hours like some sites suggests to do. Actually cats can run into very serious trouble if they do not eat for 24 hours, specially if the cat is overweight, so safe approach is best.

I personally like the approach to be, a little bit of food here and a little there but NO free feeding as it will be best to establish a schedule.

If you work all day and this is not possible try getting a self feeder at the pet store where you can set up the feeding times while you are not at home.

Do not starve your cat, just reduce the amount of food to half of what they normally eat.

Slowly introduce the wet food, but do not mix it with the dry, just put it on the side of the dry so they can get use to the smell at first.

Another trick is to sugar coat the wet food, maybe with a little of plain yogurt or even vanilla flavored yogurt for those felines who have a sweet tooth, anything to get he or she to eat it just as a treat at first, maybe even just a dot of butter scotch as a topping can be added.

Every day do less topping until he or she will eat it with no topping at all.

Some sites recommend to do the toppings with a little tuna, you can do that too, however we at HPR do NOT recommend anything with fish, as fishy foods can be the culprits of stone formation, crystals in the urine and UTI 's.

Tuna specially has a lot of mercury which is NOT recommended to be given to cats at all and contrary to what people believe tuna is NOT good for cats.

The consumption of tuna every day is not even recommend for people let alone for pets!

But if tuna is going to make your cat be on the way to better eating, then by all means use it, in very small amounts, but then of course some cats do not like tuna.

Please note that that cats prefer their food at "body temperature", if you do use the microwave to heat up your cat(s) food do not do it more than once or twice as if done more it will create bacteria growth.

You can also crush some of the dry food that your cat is use to eating and sprinkle it over the new wet food as a topping.

Contrary to human thinking cats do not need to have access to food 24/7, a healthy cat it is not going to perish for not having food around to much on for a few hours.

Home-Prepared Diets

As much as we will like to cook for our pets and know exactly what we give them food wise, please be aware that cats cannot live on meat alone so home prepared diets can be the very best thing or the absolute worse.

Unfortunately a cat balance diet requires, taurine, essential fatty acids and calcium, being calcium a CRITICAL ingredient in their diet.

Meat alone does not provide a balanced diet.

If you do decide that a home prepared diet is what you want to feed, please do your homework on how to prepare a balanced diet.

Raw diets:

I personally advise against raw diets for various reasons, meat contamination from bacteria, mold, salmonella, etc., etc.

Gosh we are having all of the above with cook diets these days, imagine raw!!!

Feeding raw diets is of course of personal choice, and if you choose to do so, please proceed with caution when buying pre-ground raw pet food.

It is best to get whole meet at the butcher's and grind it yourself in your own grinder.

As I said and will repeat, I would advise against ANY raw diet either purchased ready or made at home!

COMMERCIAL CANNED FOODS FOR YOUR FELINE CARNIVORE

What to recommend, well, the truth is that any commercial cat food you buy has some drawback to some degree, however after intense research HPR recommends the brand foods below that are available on the market today.

We also recommend to stay away from fish as we mentioned above.

Unfortunately some of the below mentioned brands do contain fish, just use you best judgment.

Halo:

<http://www.halopets.com/>

Fromm:

<http://www.frommfamily.com/>

Evangers:

<http://www.evangersdogfood.com/cat/index.html>

Lotus:

<http://www.lotuspetfoods.com/catchicken.html>

Now if you decide that the above mentioned food is not what you want or what you can afford, we have incorporated the link below which is a comprehensive list of each food manufacturer from A to Z.

This list came out after the 2007 food recalls, the reason of why we are putting this link here, is because it lists all pet foods brands, their manufacturers, as

well to where the food is made, whether in the US or elsewhere, as well as by whom ex.: Menu Foods, etc.

I will personally will stay away from any foods that have been recalled in the past and anything made by Menu Foods.

http://thepetfoodlist.com/petfoods_pg1.htm

Below is also a link to Pet Food Direct, I have added this link here not because we want you to buy your pet food from them (that is something of your choice) but because you can search for any pet food brands and check its ingredients, once you find the food you want click on "View Details" and it will list each ingredient for that particular food.

<http://www.petfooddirect.com/>

A few tips and notes to close:

Water in any pet diet is very important and essential, make sure water is always clean and fresh.

Cats do not drink much water by nature, therefore it is very important to encourage them to do so.

This can be done by purchasing water fountains or since cats like to drink from different sources it is important that water bowls are placed throughout the house and not just next to the food bowl.

Water and food dishes are also very important we discourage the use of plastic bowls as they can create skin problems and also since plastic is porous it can collect bacteria if not properly cleaned every day.

Styrofoam dishes, stay as far as way from them as you can, never use Styrofoam dishes at all.

Ceramic, glass or stainless bowls are the best for your pet.

Food should be fresh every day also, any left over kibble (if that is what you feed) from the AM needs to be disposed in the PM and replenished with fresh kibble.

Can food if you add water to the can food to add moisture to if has to be thrown out after 15 minutes are else bacteria will grow in it.

Food and water bowls also will need to be washed every day, just as you wash your own dishes.

Happy feeding!

Please feel free to e-mail us @: HPRESQ@aol.com if you have any questions or need advise, we are always here for you and your pet.

Celene Albano
HPR Rescue CEO

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