



Hurricane Pets Rescue Inc.

Cat Nutrition 101



What is in pet food.

This article came about after the massive pet food recalls that happened in 2007 that were culprits of many pets being violently ill, and some even died.

After this happened pet owners were completely at a loss as to what to feed their pets.

All of this triggered my research about what is in pet food, which took over a year to complete.

I am not a vet nor a pet nutritionist, nor a writer, I am a pet parent just like you are, and a rescuer and my job as a rescuer is first and foremost to educate the public as best as I can in animal welfare matters and what my pets eat is my responsibility and concern.

After the massive recalls that happened in 2007, here we are many years later and recalls still happen that nobody knows about it as none hit the news.

And our pets keep getting sick and ill by the very same food that is supposed to make them strong and healthy, and their lives are shortened because of what they eat.

The fact is that these manufacturing companies are just selling a product, they are about making money, and they can care less about what is good for our pets.

In my research I have read every single pet food label on every single brand of pet food on the market, and where it is made and what the ingredients are, etc., etc.

Even though this article has been written with cats in mind, it all applies to 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 needs 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.

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 **OBLIGATE carnivores** they need Animal-Based Protein, meaning that they need to get their nutritional needs met by 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 of 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 canned food, well not the case.

If we look at cats in their natural environment, you would probably 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 **obligate 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, eggshells, 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 phytoestrogen 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 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 your feline.

- 6- "Indoor only" is just a marketing gimmick, now days food companies got creative to raise more profit once again 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 some manufacturers are now substituting the word "corn" with "maize".

Well I hate to brake it to you but Maize is corn and since some of these companies are 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 considered un-safe.

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

Diabetes:

Is very serious and difficult to manage.

It is common for 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 burn 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 needs IMMEDIATE medical attention, especially if the cat is a male.

Cats eating canned food are more appropriately hydrated, and therefore, have more diluted 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 cat's 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 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.

About 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 would like to add – repeat here again aside from the nutrition fact but this is important:

ANY cat urinating inappropriately should be checked 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 you did, animals do not do that.

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 why many obese pets eating these so called "Light" diets are still obese and do not lose 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 most 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 a high protein wet diet.

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 your cat on steroids.

On as side note steroids can send any cat of any age straight into heart failure.

So before your pet goes on a course of steroids make sure the heart is good and ask your vet to do at the very least a Cardio Pet Pro BNP.

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!

But for their sake we must disobey for once, especially when it comes to those felines that want nothing to do with eating wet food and that want junk food.

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

I often hear from pet owners, my cat has been on this and that food all of his or her life and is fine.

While that may be the case, cats are pros at masking disease, and usually by the time they show signs of anything any illness is by then too far advanced.

Anyway, if you have one of those cats 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 always the key, don't expect your cat to jump right on it to change, cats are creatures of habits and they do not like change, so they will protest.

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!

Others will say: What the heck are you giving me.

In some cases you will need to use hunger to help with the transition.

I personally do not advise cats not to eat for 24 hours like some sites suggest that you do.

Cats can run into very serious trouble if they do not eat for 24 hours, especially if the cat is overweight, so safe approach is best.

I personally like the approach to being, 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 for the dry food and another self-feeder for the wet food of the kind that you can put an ice pack underneath.

You can get these at any pet store, this way you can just 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 used to the smell at first.

Do not save wet food that has been sitting out for more than an hour. Just throw it out.

Another trick is to sugar coat the wet food, maybe with a little Churu on top, or anything that they really love, anything to get he or she to eat it just as a treat at first.

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

Some sites recommend doing 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 especially has a lot of mercury which is NOT recommended to be given to cats at all, contrary to what people believe tuna is NOT good for cats.

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

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

Please note that cats prefer their food at "room 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 used 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 is not going to perish for not having food around 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, as busy as some of us are is not always possible.

It takes time to prepare diets at home that are nutritionally complete for our cats.

Please be aware that even though cats are **obligate carnivores**' cats cannot live on meat alone so home prepared diets can be the very best thing or the absolute worse.

Unfortunately, a cat balanced 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 strongly advise against raw diets.

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

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

It is best to get whole meat 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!

Raw diets tend to be contaminated with pathogens (bacteria, parasites) that may cause your cat to become ill.

These pathogens such as Salmonella, Listeria, E. coli, etc., etc. also pose a risk to us humans.

Some argue that cats can "handle" the bacteria from these diets and it does not affect them, this isn't true.

In my research after speaking with the best internal medicine veterinarians in the country as well as general practice vets, the above statement isn't true.

As cats they have illnesses that they see due to raw diets, and it's been well documented that organisms found in raw diets are shed by pets eating the diet and spread to humans in the household.

Pets who shed these organisms are often healthy and they show no signs of being sick.

There are a ton of myths put out by those who sell and promote raw diets.

The FDA, AVMA (American Veterinary Medical Association) AAHA (American Animal Hospital Association) all recommend against feeding a raw diet to your cat.

It is very different when BIG CATS, such as a lion for example, catch their own prey and eat it raw, than giving your cat raw meat that has been frozen and stored it for lord knows how long until it hits the stores.

Some claim that the freezing process kills bacteria, it does not, a lot can survive freezing temperatures.

Lastly, Raw diets are just recalled the same and as many times as cooked diets.

Always check the labels for the food you are buying, look for tabs that say "View Details", or "Nutritional Value" or simply "Ingredients", if the ingredients are hard to find or if they do not have it do not buy it.

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.

If you go the water fountain route, please keep in mind that these fountains need to be cleaned everyday or at least every other day as they can collect mold, it is very important that you soak the pump in vinegar and water for 20 minutes when cleaning it too.

Water and food dishes are also very important.

We discourage the use of plastic bowls as they can create skin problems and 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, they are toxic to cats.

Ceramic, glass, or stainless bowls are the best for your pet, keep in mind that not all stainless steel is the same so do your research when buying.

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

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

We do not recommend the adding of water to wet food, wet food already has the water content that your cat needs, if you add food to it you are cutting calories and nutrients as well that your cat needs. Food and water bowls, 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 advice, our pack is standing by to answer any questions you may have.

For Hurricane Pets Rescue Inc.
Celene Albano HPR Rescue CEO

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