

Canned Cat Food

From Franny Syufy at About.com

Can Your Cat Afford to Live Without It?

Although many people rely on dry cat food as a staple for their cats' diets, canned cat food is a must for developing strong bones and muscles, while mitigating many potential conditions caused or contributed to by an all-dry cat food diet. It's true that dry cat food is convenient; it doesn't spoil rapidly, and most cats like the "crunch" of eating dry kibbles. However, dry cat food has its definite "downside." Cats who eat a diet of only dry food are losing out on the extra nutrition they can get with canned cat food. Many commercial dry foods are packed with carbohydrate fillers, usually corn, listed as "corn meal," "ground whole corn," "corn gluten," or even more thinly disguised as "maize," "ground yellow maize" or other misleading names.

The ingredients listings are often split, which gives the consumer a false impression of the true proportion of carbohydrate to protein, e.g., "Poultry by-product meal, ground yellow corn, wheat flour, corn gluten meal, soybean meal, brewers rice..." Of the first six listed ingredients of this popular "grocery store premium" brand, four are carbohydrates, with the combined corn ingredients leading the list. I'd pass this food by, simply because of the first listed ingredient, *poultry by-product meal*, but that's another article.

In the wild, a cat will eat only a very small quantity of any grain, namely the stomach contents of mice, rabbits, or birds he catches. Why then, should a pampered household cat eat a diet that is loaded with the one food nutrient he really doesn't need? Although french fries and Twinkies might be tasty treats on occasion, what human would consider living on them day in and day out, much less feed them to their children as a regular diet? Why then, would we do less for our cats?

Dry cat food can also contribute or be directly related to certain health conditions:

■ Feline Diabetes

Elizabeth Hodgkins, DVM, does not mince words about the connection between dry cat food and feline diabetes. On her web site at www.yourdiabeticcat.com, she states, "Without the constant feeding of highly processed, high carbohydrate dry foods, better suited to cattle than cats, adult-onset feline diabetes would be a rare disease, if it occurred at all."

■ Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD)

Dr. Lisa Pierson, DVM, states, "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 common therapeutic regimen needs to be re-evaluated. There are an impressive number of anecdotal reports of cats that were terribly ill with IBD exhibiting dramatic improvement when ALL dry food was removed from their diet."

- **Chronic Renal Failure (CRF)**

Dr. Lisa Pierson, DVM, states, "It is troubling to think about the role that chronic dehydration plays in feline kidney failure. And remember, cats are chronically dehydrated when they are on a diet of predominantly dry food."

- **Urinary crystals and cystitis**

The chances of bladder crystals or bladder inflammation are greatly reduced with a canned or raw food diet, which both give the essential hydration needed for a healthy urinary tract.

- **Diarrhea**

Diarrhea and other allergy-related conditions are often caused by corn or wheat fillers in dry cat food. After eliminating other potential medical causes, switching to canned or raw food can make the diarrhea go away almost overnight.

- **Dehydration**

Cats on canned food diets or raw food get sufficient water in their food. Cats on dry food alone must be given plenty of water, especially during hot summer months.

Isn't Raw Food Better?

In a word, yes, if you can feed your cat a nutritiously-prepared raw food diet, such as one of these:

- **CatNutrition.org Recipe**
Recipe for preparing "from scratch."
- **Frozen and Freeze-Dried Raw Cat Food**
My list of commercially-available raw foods
- **Feline Instincts**
Another excellent commercial raw food.

However, if time constraints or expenses prevent you from embracing a raw food diet for your cats, canned food is by far the second-best choice.

Certainly, raw food is exactly what cats eat in the wild, by necessity. Dr. Pottenger did a study in the mid 20th century, which resulted in evidence that a cooked meat diet caused physical deterioration in cats and their offspring, over a period of time. (Some contemporary experts have questioned whether it was the lack of taurine, rather than the cooking, that caused the nutritional deficiencies Pottenger cited.)

While many feline nutrition experts recommend a raw meat diet for cats, this isn't always workable for some cat caregivers. Other experts recommend canned food only, with dry food reserved as "treats," to be doled out two or three kibbles at a time.

A Word About Dental Care

The old axiom was that "canned food can cause dental disease in cats." The reality of the situation is that fancy kibble shapes aside, food is not a dentifrice. All cats require a regular dental program of brushing, rinsing, along with regular veterinary dental exams and professional cleaning, if required.

I would encourage a raw diet as a long or short term goal, and striving for an all, or mostly, canned cat food in the interim. My own cats have historically eaten a dry diet, but the "new generation" (My four-cat "chowder") are eating both canned and dry. The adults presently get a can in the morning, and again in the evening, and Billy, the new kitten, gets two cans a day, divided into three feedings. It's important to note that I feed only premium foods to my cats, both dry and canned. I never purchase a new brand without reading the label thoroughly. They also get a variety of brands and flavors of foods. As I mentioned earlier, no one wants to eat french fries every day.

I'll increase the proportion of canned food over time, until they are ready to make the switch. Then, some day, we'll see about a raw food diet.