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**WHAT
YOU SHOULD
BE FEEDING
YOUR CAT**



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What should I feed r

With a wide variety of cat foods on offer and the feline tendency to be particular about what they eat, how can we be sure we are feeding appropriately?

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There is a lot of conflicting information out there regarding dry (kibble) vs wet (canned/pouch) food, grain vs grain-free, raw vs conventional diets, and fads like organic or gluten free. All of this can be confusing for any cat owner.

The fact is, as yet we do not know what the optimal combination of protein, fat and carbohydrates (macronutrients) for the perfect feline diet is. We do know the minimal requirements of the more important of these macronutrients and commercial diets are manufactured based on these for each life-stage group. i.e. kitten, neutered cat etc. with additional essential vitamins and minerals.

Here are the facts based on current scientific evidence:

- Cats are obligate carnivores that have developed unique strategies to utilise protein, fats, carbohydrates and vitamins. Cats can metabolise carbohydrates but in smaller amounts than dogs; but carbohydrates are not an essential dietary nutrient for cats. Cats have significant ongoing daily requirements for high quality protein.

When populations of feral and colony cat's food preferences were studied they naturally selected high protein (52%) moderate-fat (35%) and very low carbohydrate (12%) diets which matches to a degree the small rodents and birds that make up the majority of their natural diet.

- Cats cannot survive on a vegetar-



ian, vegan diet. It might suit you - but it isn't for puss.

- * Cats are hunters but the drive to hunt is independent from the drive to eat. Feeding more food doesn't stop them from killing birds or mice; it merely results in weight gain. Cats eat many small meals a

day, they eat alone and have a small stomach, resulting in a lower intake of calories per meal. Feeding twice a day or having the bottomless bowl of food is not a 'natural' way for cats to eat. Set meal feeding reduces mental stimulation which can lead to boredom, apathy, anxiety, frustration, stress and ultimately weight gain through overeating.

- Diet and teeth: In a study comparing feral cats eating a 'wild diet' and domestic cats eating commercial dry and canned diets there was no difference in the degree of periodontitis in either group. Calculus (tartar) accumulation was present in both groups but less in cats fed commercial diets. Other factors such as breed, age, chewing behaviour and general health may have a considerable influence on the prevalence of periodontal disease.

- Raw or homemade diets: Raw diets consist primarily of meat, bones, and organs that haven't been subjected to any heat treatment. Raw diets are more likely than cooked food to contain disease-causing micro-organisms such as salmonella, campylobacter, parasites and protozoa. These organisms can pass through your cat,

posing a health risk to the humans in the home (particularly the very young, elderly or immunocompromised). Handling raw diets can also pose a risk of transmission to the humans preparing them. Homemade diets are those that are prepared to a recipe from multiple different ingredients. One study showed 90% of these diets were nutritionally imbalanced and the diets had incorrect levels of calcium and phosphorus. Raw diets can also be nutritionally imbalanced.

- Grain vs Grain free: The commonly identified food allergens in cats with dietary hypersensitivities are beef (20%), dairy (14.6%), fish (13%) lamb (6.7%) and barley/wheat (4.5%). Grains are not inherently more allergenic. Grain-free diets are not necessarily low in dietary carbohydrates as the alternate sources of carbohydrate used could contain at least as much sugar.

Dry foods by nature of their manufacturing and composition contain more carbohydrates than their canned/raw counterparts. However recent studies suggest that high carbohydrate diets are not associated with weight gain and obesity in cats but that other factors such as dietary fat, energy density and feeding method play a more important role.

Commercial foods are not bad; they are manufactured to be complete, balanced and provide at least the minimum requirements (usually a lot more) of the essential nutrients your cat will require at that particular stage of their

my cat?

life. Some commercial foods will have higher quality ingredients than others and in order to choose a suitable diet for your cat, research the company, the ingredient list and the nutrient profile of the foods you are feeding – Read the back of the pack! This is an area which has seen tremendous improvement in the last twenty years, with the resultant increase in life expectancy of cats fed on commercial foods over the last few decades. However as we have seen, mistakes can still occur and so we would suggest that commercial cat food from a single source is not the sole nutrition for your cat.

It is important to note whether a food is 'complete' or 'complementary', the latter means the product will not be balanced and should only be fed as a treat or alongside a complete diet. Feeding this alone could result in significant nutritional imbalances. Food prepared for humans is not balanced for your cat's requirements, cooked chicken for example can have a lot less taurine than cats need and if fed this alone it can result in deficiency which can cause eye and heart problems. Similarly a 100% raw fish diet can result in thiamine deficiency which causes reversible brain damage.

Palatability

The factors determining what a cat finds palatable are complex but include texture, odour, taste and temperature. The senses of taste and smell combine to give the perception of the flavour of a food and, for cats, foods that have a high level of protein and fat in general are much more palatable. Cats being predators find food more palatable when food is slightly warmed to body temperature (around

35°C).

While cats can taste substances that are salty, sour or bitter, unlike humans and dogs they are not able to perceive sweet tastes. The texture of food is also important and in general cats prefer the texture of meat.

What to do?

We can help you choose a diet that is appropriate for your cat and you. We generally recommend mixed 2/3 wet and 1/3 dry diet appropriate to your cat's life stage and body condition. This enables them to experience a range of tastes and textures. If your cat prefers wet food more than dry it is ok to feed 100% wet. When choosing a wet food choose the best quality you can comfortably afford with the highest percentage of high quality protein (think mouse in a can!). If your cat prefers dry food over wet, you will need to be creative but wet food is a good start.

Cats are still individuals (and don't us cat owners know that?) so there is a large degree of variation in

taste. Experimentation and variety are the key to finding what best tingles the tastebuds of your cat.

If you are keen to feed a raw diet we are here to help you find a diet that is nutritionally balanced and guide you with appropriate food safety measures. The source, storage and handling of the raw food is very important to reduce potential health issues. If homemade diets of are of interest we can advise you and direct you to veterinary nutritionists that will give comprehensive advice to make the diet appropriate and balanced.



Dr. Jeremy Campbell is founder of The London Cat Clinic. A feline only veterinary practice opening in May 2017. In 2015 he became a Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons Advanced Practitioner in Feline Medicine, one of only 15 people to currently hold that qualification in the United Kingdom.