

Why Dry Food is a Slow Killer Or How to Avoid Large Vet Bills

By Cánie Brooks

Although dry food diets are quite common for domestic cats, they are still obligate carnivores. This means that they require animal protein and not plant protein, as the essential component of their diet. They do not have a requirement for carbohydrates at all. In fact, conspicuous carbohydrate consumption can contribute to the development of serious health issues including obesity, diabetes, gum disease and dehydration to name a few. Given the ubiquitousness of dry food options including some very well marketed (and surely well meaning) “enhanced” and “grain-free” formulations, how can one justify switching to a wet or raw food diet for their cat?

Dry food, while being very convenient, is essentially a slow killer for cats. I was astounded the other day when I was in my Veterinarian’s office and saw a poster on the wall of the top ten¹ reasons cats came to the vet.

- Lower Urinary Tract Disease
- Stomach Upset/Gastritis
- Renal Failure
- Intestinal inflammation/diarrhea
- Skin allergies
- Diabetes
- Colitis/Constipation
- Ear Infections
- Upper respiratory virus
- Hyperthyroidism

Of those top ten, the top seven, and possibly even Hyperthyroidism, can be caused by improper diet². Coincidentally, the incidence of hyperthyroidism in cats has increased markedly in the last 25 years following the explosion in

¹ VPI Vet Insurance’s Top 10 Reasons Why Cats go to the Vet

² www.PetEducation.com - Drs Foster & Smith

popularity and diversification in flavors and claims in dry pet food³. The exact reason for this increase is unproven however it is likely due to multiple factors. While variables such as immunology, environmental influences and according to some doctors fish, are probable causes there seems little doubt that ingredients and types of foods fed are also highly suspect.

There are many reasons why dry food is an improper diet for cats. To begin with, all dry foods require the use of carbohydrates as a binder in order to be manufactured. Cats evolved biologically to process animal protein and fats, consumption of such, triggers the brain to register satiation leading the cat to feel it is 'full' and stop eating. In contrast, consumption of carbohydrates does not trigger this signal, therefore, they continue to feel hungry, leading the them to eat more and yet never feel satisfied. In addition to failing to switch off the hunger drive, carbohydrates and starches in dry food trigger glucose overloads and spiking surges of insulin⁴ from a feline carnivore's limited pancreatic reserve. In many cases this path can lead to obesity which in turn leads to diabetes. In addition to carbohydrates, dry food contains a number of ingredients such as those for binding kibble and byproducts of manufacturing that cats simply can't process which can cause stomach upset, gastritis, skin allergies, intestinal inflammation, diarrhea and colitis.⁵

Cats also evolved to satisfy their needs for water mainly from their food. When fed a dry diet they are in a constant state of mild dehydration, which in turn causes lower urinary tract disease, renal failure and constipation. Using a water fountain does tend to encourage them to drink more water by offering a novel, fresher drinking option, however, the dry food puts a terrible strain on their body's hydration.

Dry food manufacturers also market their product as good for a cat's teeth and gums. Most dry food is not even chewed, cats lack the basic dental equipment for mastication, the primary mode of breaking down a vegetarian diet. The teeth of the feline are optimal for puncturing, tearing and grasping - all features optimal for a carnivore's survival in the wild. In fact, felines have limited range of jaw unable to fully execute the motions required to "chew" so it doesn't massage their

³ www.Sojos.com/HistoryofPetFood

⁴ Dr Elizabeth Hodgkins, DVM, Esq (???)

⁵ Dr Elizabeth Hodgkins, DVM, Esq (???)

teeth and gums rather, the sugars from the carbohydrates only increase the tooth decay.⁶

It certainly is convenient to feed dry food (fewer dirty dishes, no added meal planning), however the associated costs at the vet, and in the decreased comfort and life span of your cat hardly seem worth it. It stands to reason that if you continue to feed your cat dry foods, made with carbohydrates of ANY kind, you and your cat will likely have to deal with all or some combination of obesity, diabetes, urinary tract problems, kidney disease, major teeth and gum issues, and the list goes on and on - at some point during your cat's life. Numerous outspoken Veterinarians including Dr. Lisa A. Pierson, DVM, recommend circumventing these issues by feeding a canned food diet, one without carbohydrates and fillers or even a raw diet. You will find that there is very little cost difference between a proper raw diet and a canned food diet and the raw diet is better nutritionally. Be sure to check ingredients of the canned foods. Some of the higher end expensive ones are filled with rice or grains and you don't want to feed those to the cats. Fancy Feast is a good basic canned food and relatively inexpensive.

For healthy teeth, cats need to have the opportunity to gnaw – whole chicken hearts or chunks of meat they have to work to break down are very good for their teeth and gums.

A great resource for raw diet information and recipes can be found at www.catinfo.org. They have recipes for making your own raw food, or you can buy pre-made cost effective raw diets from a number of sources such as Better in the Raw. It is also thought that Bengals are in need of more of the amino acid Taurine than other breeds due to its ancestor, the Asian Leopard Cat. You should give a good vitamin and taurine supplement daily. Kittens need to eat more often than adults. Initially, they need to eat 3 or 4 times a day, eventually, as adults, they will need to eat twice a day (About every 12 hours). A neutered adult cat will eat approximately 2.5 - 3 ounces per meal, or about 5-6 ounces a day. Intact cats need to eat more. Pregnant cats should be fed 3-4 times daily, about three ounces per meal or more. Feeding your cat the proper diet will save you money in the long run as you won't have the vet bills and your cat will be more comfortable, more energetic and lead a much happier life.

⁶ Lisa A Pierson DVM, www.catinfo.org

