

Sticking to dry food

Just give the cat dry food, and nothing can go wrong. That's the dominant thinking these days when it comes to feeding the cat. But is it true? Does nothing go wrong? Where do all these kidney problems come from then? And the bladder problems? Allergies are also on the rise. Is the cat food directly to blame?

Let us set the premise that good food is the basis of good health. After all, all the body's building blocks have to come from food. If the body has to do its utmost to maintain itself, there isn't much energy or building material left over to ensure good immunity. What then, is good food? Experience has taught me that good cat food is what is closest to what a wild feline would eat. That does not mean dry food, which are largely made up of grains, which are the last thing a wild cat would eat. No. Meat, fresh raw meat with bones and ground vegetables, that is what a cat does well on.

What is in dry food?

To be able to determine what dry food is, I will begin by describing how dry food is made and what is in them. As I have already said: grains. Usually, grains are the main ingredient in dry food. Because cats can't actually digest grains, the grain has to be processed. One way this is done is by expanding it. To do this it is heated, sometimes up to 200°C. Out of practical considerations, the meat content is in the form of meat meal (and meal from by-products). Never mind the quality of this meal. Let's assume that it is the more favourable case where it is indeed actual meat meal and not ground up heads and feathers. This is heated together with the grain. In the process of heating, the sugars in the meal react with the amino acids (called Maillard reactions). This causes bonds that can no longer be assimilated by the digestive system, including acrylamides, which have been shown to cause cancer in humans. The amino acid taurine almost completely disappears. Many of the minerals enter into bonds to become insoluble salts, practically all the vitamins are lost, and the fats oxidize.

To make the dry food nutritionally complete, vitamins and minerals are added again later. These are however synthetic vitamins and minerals, and they are not as easily assimilated by the digestion as the natural form. All in all, the digestive system is considerably stressed with a lot of unusable remnants that only load the system and can slowly but surely poison the body.

Grains disturb your cat's sugar level. They easily become too fat and can get diabetes, like people who eat too much candy. Cats with diabetes often do very well on a grain-free diet, comparable to the Atkins diet for humans. Again, this is because cats are not carbohydrate eaters but rely on proteins and fats as their primary sources of energy. Their entire metabolism is set up to digest animal products. Many plant-based materials cannot be converted into usable nutrients.

Dry food is 'dead' food. All the bacteria are destroyed, all the enzymes are dead. This is handy because it keeps longer that way. The disadvantage is that these bacteria and enzymes perform a useful function. The bacteria are necessary to build stable intestinal flora, and the enzymes are needed to help all kinds of processes in the body run smoothly.

Dry food

Dry food contains very little water. This helps it to keep longer, and there is less to transport. Cats originated as savannah animals. They drink little water themselves. They get the water they need from their prey. When you give cats dry food, they are receiving a systematically inadequate moisture intake. They do compensate this by drinking a bit more, but they probably still don't drink enough. Many bladder and kidney problem can arise in this way.

Deep-freeze pizza

To illustrate all this compare giving dry food to eating frozen pizza supplemented with a preparation of multivitamins. Every day. It does indeed contain everything you need, but that doesn't make it healthy. Good nutrition is more than the sum of its parts. As well as the well-known vitamins, minerals, proteins, fats, and carbohydrates, there are also innumerable less-known nutrients that are also necessary for good health, and the only way to avoid missing these is by using natural sources: meat, vegetables, and bones. With variation the body gets a richly variegated nutrient intake and the body itself can select what it needs.

Fats

Dry food doesn't contain a lot of fat. In fact they can't because fats don't keep, even if it says on the package that it contains omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids. Fats, and all polyunsaturated fatty acids, oxidize when exposed to light and air. They actually need to be stored in a cool and dark place. No matter how much antioxidant, chemical or otherwise, the manufacturers adds, they still don't keep. This while the natural energy sources of the cat are proteins and fats.

But what then?

As I have already mentioned a couple of times: meat, vegetables, and bone. Actually, what our cat eats should resemble what a wild cat would eat. That means prey animals. Prey consists of raw meat, organ meat, bones, intestinal contents, fur and feathers. Cats eat much less organ meat and intestinal contents than dogs. Fur and feathers are indigestible components. We can imitate this by giving whole day-old chicks, or by making a vegetable mixture that is partly indigestible. The meat can come from any animal, except for raw pig meat. Pork can contain a virus that causes Aujeszki's disease. Cats and dogs are much more sensitive to this disease than pigs. Only use meat that is fit for human consumption, if only because you touch it with your own hands. So: chicken, beef, lamb, veal, duck, pigeon, goat, rabbit, anything you can get is allowed. Eggs, cottage cheese, and fish are also alright. Change is important. Chicken is cheap and easy to get, but don't give your cat chicken every day. Try to give a different sort of meat at least three times per week. If you give fish, select whole fish as much as possible, with everything on it and in it.

Bacteria

Raw meat is scary because there are scary bacteria on it! That's true. But how do you think a wild cat does it? It doesn't carry a pot of water around to cook everything first. By ingesting all sorts of bacteria your cat's immunity improves. The body learns to deal with the various bacteria that are found on meat. Birds and mice that a wild cat catches are also not sterile. For beginner cats and owners it can be wise to give cooked meat for the first couple of weeks. That meat must then be cooked more and more lightly and thus the cat (read: its stomach and intestines) can slowly get used to the change. Ultimately you can give meat that is completely raw.

Aside from that, you do need to take precautions yourself if you cut the meat for your cat or otherwise touch it. Use clean materials, wash your hands well and clean the knife and cutting board thoroughly before you use them again.

Vegetables

Vegetables contain a lot of vitamins and minerals and partial carbohydrates and some proteins. The carbohydrates are partially insoluble and provide fibre to increase the volume of excretions somewhat. Anything except for leeks and onions is fine. Raw vegetables must be ground as finely as possible, because whole raw vegetables are not digested. Cats lack the enzyme for breaking down plant cells. This must be done for them, and this is possible by grinding it finely in a food processor or juicer. Fruit may be added sparingly. You can control the weight of your cat somewhat using vegetables. Give overweight cats more vegetables and less meat. You can give more fats to

cats that do need a lot of energy because they are thin. Only give a small amount of vegetables. Two teaspoons per meal is enough. More may only be given to cats that have difficulty with defecation.

Organ meat

Cats are not really organ meat eaters. A bit of liver, heart, stomachs, or kidney is alright. Change is good. Some cats prefer it cooked, others prefer it raw. That is a question of testing it out.

Bones

Bones are their own story. People are always afraid that bones will splinter. This is possible, but raw bones splinter less than baked or cooked bones. Always give raw bones. Bones with a lot of meat on them give fewer problems with splintering or choking. This means chicken wings or necks for example. These are the most suitable bones for a cat. Necks are the best for beginning cats because they contain relatively soft bones. Sometimes they need to be made a bit smaller

Chewing on bones is very good for tartar on teeth. Even if your cat already has tartar, this will be removed by giving a chicken neck regularly, for instance three times per week. Giving a solid piece of tough meat also works well for tartar, beefsteak for example. Give about a quarter of a whole steak. Then they have to pull and chew strongly to eat it.

What do I give my cat?

Cats are fussy eaters. If they are not used to fresh meat it can be very difficult sometimes to get them to eat it. I also suspect that there is quite a bit of flavouring added to dry food because some cats seem to us be addicted to certain brands of dry food. It is also very dangerous for fat cats to fast. This means that we can't just put fresh food in front of them and see if they eat it. It is a question of having patience and being persistent. Some cats are very easy, they like it immediately. For most cats it takes a lot of getting used to. The best is to start with small portions along with the dry food. Then they can carefully test if they like it. With a lot of experimentation you can discover what they like. For instance canned tuna, which most cats will kill for. You can mix it with the meat to make it tastier.

For people who don't want to make it too complicated, and who have a healthy cat without complaints, it is simpler to regularly give fresh cat food along with the dry food. There are also a few good frozen fresh meat cat foods on the market, for example Prins, Bibi, Carnibest and Bandit. This last one is even organic. These can be alternated with heart, fish, or meat, as well as vegetables. As long the cat is given half dry food the supplement doesn't have to be complete. It is preferable not to mix the dry food with the fresh cat food. For cats without health problems, fresh meat is recommended two whole days per week. You will notice that your cat does improve a bit, with more beautiful fur, more energy, better immunity, fewer fleas. For cats with problems, especially skin and digestive problems, it is recommended to go to fresh meat cat food as much as possible. Whether it's frozen or homemade doesn't matter very much. About 70-80% of skin and digestive problems improve considerably on fresh meat. Other problems can also improve on fresh meat, particularly bladder problems. Fresh meat is acid forming and contains a lot of moisture, so that the bladder contents become acidic and the bladder is well rinsed. I know from experience that cats with kidney problems also do well on fresh meat. This doesn't seem to make sense because there is a lot of protein in it. I think it is because there is so much moisture in it and they like to eat it, so they don't lose weight, and because the proteins in it are more digestible and therefore generate fewer waste products.

All in all, this is a very different tale than 'just give dry food'. A lot more complicated, but experience shows that the animals get a lot healthier from it. Fewer problems, better immunity, cleaner teeth. Whether they also live longer is not yet known, but time will tell.

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