

DEBUNKING THE MYTHS OF THE FELINE DIET



WHAT IS PROPER NUTRITION FOR YOUR CAT?

Cats come to visit us for various reasons. Illnesses, injuries, and new kitten visits are all popular reasons to bring your cat to the doctor. Among all the different accounts that we run into with pet owners, feline nutrition is often at the top of the list of insecurities for what is the best thing to do. We often hear “How much should I feed my cat?” or “Isn’t dry food better to feed cats for their teeth?” Even “How am I supposed to choose the right food with so many different brands on the market today?” Considering nutrition touches every aspect of the health of our pets, feeding your cat properly is vital to a long, happy life. Let’s take a deeper look....

When browsing pet foods at the store, there is so much to think about. You can feed your cat dry, canned, or even raw commercial diets. Unlike popular thought, dry food is not always the best option for our feline friends. Cats tend to not be good water drinkers, so a diet with more moisture is better for their overall nutrition. Also, thinking back to a cat’s primal diet, cats are carnivores. Canned or raw foods are much closer to what they originally ate as wild animals. Importantly it is good to know that cats also lack the enzyme that metabolizes plant based proteins.

In addition, dry food is high in carbohydrates, which cats need very little of in their diet. A diet high in carbohydrates can cause diseases like diabetes, inflammatory bowel disease, kidney disease, and obesity. Also dry food actually leaves a residue on the teeth that encourages plaque build up. So unlike the popular myth, it is actually not better for their teeth.

This is not to completely discount all dry cat food diets. There are times when cat owners can not feasibly feed their pets canned or raw pet foods. When looking for a quality dry cat food the first three ingredients need to contain meat or meat meal such as beef, chicken, or turkey. Wheat, corn, soy, sugar, or gluten are not quality ingredients in pet foods. Even foods that are labeled organic are not always the highest quality food, if it contains high amounts of grain.

Don't fall for gimmicky dry pet food names either. Foods labeled for senior cats, hairball issues, or breed specific foods are often marketing techniques. Most times these issues can be addressed in a good, quality pet food or food based nutritional supplements that can be found at your veterinarian office.

On to the most commonly asked question that we get in the veterinary office about feline nutrition: "How much should I feed my cat?" To answer the question, feeding amounts vary by age, type of food, and energy level of the patient. Kittens, adults, overweight cats, underweight cats all need different caloric intake depending on the foods they are being fed.

The best way to find the right amount of kilocalories that your cat should be eating everyday is by talking to your veterinarian. Through the use of mathematical equations and your pets lifestyle they formulate what your cat should be eating every day. The doctors will also be able to tell you if your pet is overweight, underweight, or being fed a proper quantity of food. In addition they can address any other medical problems, like arthritis, that can be managed with a nutritional supplement. In all, yearly exams would be highly beneficial and can even be critical for the health of your pet.

A few things to remember about feline diet-

- Dry foods are not always the best option
- Read the ingredients on the back of the bag
- Double check the feeding guidelines on the product with your veterinarian.
- In having your cat examined by a doctor annually they will be able to closely monitor your cats nutrition and needs.

Always remember that South Town Animal Hospital is here for you and your cat. Cats are amazing members of the family and we want to ensure that they live healthy, long lives.

