

Purr-fecting Feline Nutrition: Cat Nutrition 101

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Cats are infamous for being picky eaters. Their pickiness could be attributed to a variety of reasons, the most common being that they are simply not stimulated enough or they require some variety in their diet. However, when they do choose to oblige us by eating, we are often left wondering whether we are providing our feline companions with adequate nutrition or not.

Understanding the fundamental requirements of a cat's diet may help you resolve your concerns in this regard.

Taurine

A discussion on feline nutrition is incomplete without the word "taurine". Taurine is an amino acid that is considered an essential amino acid in cats. They require relatively large amounts of it in their diet. Cats can make some taurine, but the enzyme required to make it out of cysteine is in short supply and needed in other physiological pathways. Therefore, without an adequate dietary supply of taurine, cats eventually become taurine deficient.

A taurine deficiency can have severe ramifications. Taurine-depleted cats will have retinal degeneration, cardiomyopathy, altered white-cell function, and abnormal growth and development. A taurine deficiency can also lead to reproductive failure, poor growth in kittens born to taurine-deficient cats, and gastrointestinal disturbances.

Taurine is found almost exclusively in animal-based sources of protein (meat, fish, etc.) so cats eating vegetarian or vegan diets are at the highest risk.

What should cats eat?

Cats are obligate carnivores. They need certain nutrients that their body cannot make unless it is fed. This is possible only by way of feeding them meat. As indicated above, animal-based sources of protein (poultry dark meat, buffalo meat, pork tenderloin to name a few) contain the amino acid taurine and several other nutrients that are essential to your cat's diet. Fresh lightly cooked meats or raw diets, is what we recommend for our feline companions, as the diet is rich in moisture and has all the essential components needed to keep our cats healthy.

Choosing cat food

We are big proponents of feeding fresh – because fresh meats have nutrients that are more bioavailable to your cat without all the nasty preservatives, colouring and non-species-appropriate ingredients. However, if you were to opt for processed food for the sake of convenience, we recommend opting for wet food as opposed to dry food. Since cats don't tend to drink too much water being desert animals, dry food could at some point lead to a higher risk of Feline Urinary Tract Disease and Kidney Disease. What's worse is that kidney disease usually goes undetected until 70% of the kidney functionality has been eroded – making it a little too late to salvage the situation.

Commercial cat food

If you have opted for commercial cat food, do look at the list of ingredients. You must avoid foods that have colouring, preservatives, palatants and too many words you don't understand on the label. Always remember that ingredients are listed in order of percentage that the food is made up most of – that means that if you have corn or soy as one of the first few ingredients, it means that the food is in essence carb heavy.

As a general rule, you must ensure that the food you pick is low on carbs and low on fibre. Your cat will overeat carb-heavy food in a bid to make up for the lack of protein in the food. This will, in the long run, lead to obesity, diabetes, fatty liver disease, pancreatitis and a host of inflammatory conditions that could have been avoided if your cat was fed a species-appropriate diet.