

Cats are Obligate Carnivores

Information regarding the proper diet and nutrition for felines has changed over the years as veterinarians who specialize or take a special interest in nutrition for felines have continued to conduct research on feline nutrition. What you feed your RagaMuffin cat has a big impact on their overall health, just as a human's diet affects their health. Learning about the proper diet for your RagaMuffin can potentially save you and your cat from suffering through unnecessary illnesses that can be painful to your RagaMuffin cat, as well as expensive to treat.

An increasing number of veterinarians that are knowledgeable about feline nutrition are recommending that their feline clients be fed canned food versus dry food. It is a fact that cats are obligate carnivores. This means that cats rely on nutrients in animal tissues to meet their nutritional requirements. In nature, cats consume prey that is high in animal protein, moderate in fat content and low in carbohydrates. Although dry food contains protein, it is more likely to contain "plant based protein" than "meat based protein." Cats do not digest and utilize plant based proteins efficiently, so they do not get the benefit from such proteins that they would get from the meat based proteins found in canned food. Meat based proteins have a complete amino acid profile. Plant based proteins do not contain the full complement of the amino acids required by an obligate carnivore.

In addition, cats have certain physiologic characteristics that reflect that cats were "built" with the ideal diet being low in carbohydrates. For instance, cats lack salivary amylase, which is the enzyme responsible for initiating carbohydrate digestion. Furthermore, cats also have low amounts of intestinal and pancreatic amylase. This does not mean that cats cannot break down starch. However, these facts do suggest that cats were not meant to consume large amounts of carbohydrates and doing so may cause ill effects on their health in many different areas, including obesity, diabetes, cystitis, urinary crystals, kidney disease, hairballs, inflammatory bowel disease, and hepatic lipidosis.

Cats developed as desert-dwelling animals that obtained most of their water requirements from the prey they consumed. Cats have a less sensitive response to thirst and dehydration than do omnivores, such as dogs. Cats eating a diet of dry food will consume approximately half the amount of water in their diet and through drinking, than cats that are fed a canned food diet. Feeding canned food increases water intake and urine volume and therefore will decrease the formation of urolith-forming minerals in the urine. When you think about how common kidney disease and bladder problems are in cats, it becomes obvious why water intake is so critical to your cat's health. The increased amount of water intake from a canned food diet acts to flush out your cat's bladder.

Keep in mind that not all canned foods are low enough in carbohydrates to constitute a suitable diet for cats. Learn to read the ingredient labels on the canned food. There are many "prescription canned foods" that are very high in carbohydrates.

Transitioning your cats from a dry food diet to a canned food diet requires persistence and a lot of patience. If you have a cat that already eats canned food, the transition will be much easier, as you will simply eliminate the dry food from their diet. Some cats may react to the increase in the amount of

canned food with loose stools. If this happens, go more slowly with the transition, but don't give up!

If you have a cat that looks at canned food as if it was an alien substance and refuses to even taste it, you will need even more patience. The first thing you need to do is to stop free feeding dry food. You will have a much easier time getting your cat transitioned to canned food if your cat experiences hunger. They will not experience hunger if they have a never ending supply of potato chips (dry food) to munch on. However, do not attempt to starve your cat into making the switch to canned food. You should not allow your cat to go more than 24 hours without food. Cats that are not fed can quickly develop hepatic lipidosis (fatty liver disease), which can be very dangerous. Hepatic lipidosis can also occur when a cat consumes less than 50% of their required daily calorie requirements over a period of many days, so DO NOT starve your cat to make them transition to canned food. Your cat should consume about 15 calories per day per pound of what they "should" weigh (don't count excess fat on obese cats).

Instead of free feeding the dry food, set scheduled meal times for dry food. Put a set amount of dry food down and leave it down for 20 to 30 minutes. Remove any food that has not been eaten. Repeat this feeding in 8 to 12 hours depending on if you are feeding 2 or 3 times per day. During the first few days of transitioning to a set schedule, you can offer canned food during the dry food meals, or in-between meals. Your most stubborn cats will refuse to touch the canned food, but do not give up! All cats will eventually transition to canned food if you are determined and patient enough.

Some helpful tips to transition the very stubborn cat:

Once your cat is eating at scheduled mealtimes, you should start to feed a bit less at each meal so that your cat experiences some hunger sensation. Remember, you want a normal sensation of hunger to help you transition your cat. You do not want to starve your cat into transitioning to canned food.

At a scheduled meal time, try feeding a meal of canned food only. If your cat turns their nose up at the canned food, and it would not be unusual for a cat to do this, do not give in and put dry food down. Instead, try some of the other suggestions listed below to entice your cat to eat the canned food. If your cat still will not eat the canned food, try leaving it down for several hours and see what happens. If it has been 18 hours since your cat has eaten anything, feed him or her about ¼ cup of dry food. After they eat the dry, offer them the canned food again in a couple of hours.

Try petting your cat while they are in front of the food dish. Many cats will be stimulated to eat when being petted.

Try sprinkling a very small amount of a favorite treat, like Halo-Liv-a-Littles on the top of the canned food and then once they are eating this, start pressing it into the top of the new food.

Food that comes out of the refrigerator should be warmed up to room temperature.

Try offering some cooked (or raw - whole meats, rinsed well or parboiled) chicken or or deli-meat ('cold-cuts'), in an attempt to get your cat to eat foods that have a different texture and do not crunch like dry food.

Try a product called FortiFlora. This product can be obtained from your veterinarian or online. Most cats love FortiFlora. This is a probiotic made by Purina. You use it as a flavor enhancer. The base ingredient in FortiFlora is animal digest, which is the substance that makes dry food so enticing to cats. The directions say to use 1 package/day - and you can use this much if you want to, but $\frac{1}{4}$ of a package is usually sufficient.

Perseverance and patience are key, and remember do not starve your cat while transitioning them to canned food.