

Felines and Fresh Food Diets

Grace Waymire

Our feline friends are plagued with numerous health issues such as cancer, arthritis, obesity, irritable bowel syndrome, hyperthyroid, diabetes, allergies, kidney failure, respiratory, and autoimmune problems. Most of these health issues can be resolved through diet. Commercial cat foods were not available to consumers until the 1960's. Prior to this time cats were fed raw or cooked meats or left to catch their own meals. A 10-year feeding study of cats, conducted over 70 years ago by Francis M. Pottenger, Jr., M.D., showed that cats thrived when fed raw foods.¹

As obligate carnivores, cats require certain nutrients that can only be found in animal tissues. Their digestive system is not designed to process grains or vegetables since they have very short intestinal tracts and lack the presence of salivary amylase. Salivary amylase initiates the digestion of plant material. It is probable that commercial food causes the intestinal tract to lengthen causing loss of tone and elasticity resulting in chronic diarrhea and constipation. Processed foods, high in sugars and salt, aggravate and trigger such conditions as arthritis, diabetes, cancer, and ultimately result in obesity. Cats, originally desert type animals, receive most of their fluids from the foods they eat. Dry foods produce a chronic state of dehydration, which can lead to kidney failure. A fresh meat diet does not contain added salt or sugar and provides adequate hydration.

Taurine

Taurine is an amino acid involved with immune function, bile salt formation, nervous system and cardiac function. Cats have a limited ability to synthesize taurine from the foods they eat. Taurine is present in raw meat and eggs. Heart is high in taurine, niacin, and potassium.

Tricks to Transition

Cats become easily addicted to the texture and shape of the foods they eat. This would help explain why commercial foods are available in various shapes and sizes. Some felines easily make the transition to a fresh meat diet while others provide a bit of a challenge. Techniques to help entice the most finicky eaters include:

- Mixing a small portion of the raw meat with commercial canned food. Gradually increase the amount of fresh meat and decrease commercial food.

¹ Pottenger, Francis M., *Pottenger's Cats: A Study in Nutrition*, 2nd ed., Price-Pottenger Nutrition Foundation, Inc.: La Mesa, Ca, 1995

- Try different types of meat. My own cats, Proteus and Valentine, would not touch lamb, or beef but are now eating raw venison, turkey, and rabbit.
- If your cat likes tuna or sardines pour the juice over the new meat being introduced.
- Lightly cook meat gradually weaning to raw meat. For cats that will only eat cooked meat, consider a taurine supplement.
- Lightly salt fresh food and gradually wean.
- Perseverance is often the key in transitioning cats to a fresh food diet.

Some cats might miss a few meals before they accept this new feeding concept and others will dive in. Anorexia is a possibility so limit hunger strikes to a few days. Vomiting is often a result of gorging or adjusting to new foods. Feeding smaller portions can resolve vomiting issues. Health benefits of a fresh meat diet include increased vitality, resolution of chronic health issues, decreased stool volume and disappearance of litter box order. Animals with chronic health issues such as diabetes can be a challenge to transition but ultimately derive the greatest benefit from a fresh meat diet. Close monitoring is critical as these pets are transitioned to this new diet.

Recipes for Meals

It is important not to let meat spoil. Most cats have been conditioned to free feed throughout the day. Pick up uneaten meal within thirty minutes and offer adult cats at least two meals a day. Kittens will need 3-4 meals per day.

Portions: 1/4 cup per meal is a good starting point. Adjust this amount depending on your cat's weight, activity level, and age.

Meat – Rabbit, Venison, Cornish Game Hens, Quail, Lamb, Chicken, Turkey

Fish- feed occasionally for variety but not as a staple meat

Organ Meat – liver, heart, kidney, and spleen should be included in small amounts

Bones- rabbit bones, turkey necks, chicken necks, chicken wings

Too much bone in the diet may cause constipation. Cats sometimes enjoy playing with their bones. For indoor cats this may be a problem. Crate training is a possible solution for bone chewing in the house.

Sources of Fiber – psyllium husk powder is a good source of fiber without adding carbohydrates. Raw bone also provides fiber. Meg's Meats **bone dust** is an easy way to add fiber to a raw ground meat diet.

Supplements – Once the transition to a fresh meat diet has been successful begin adding supplements such as salmon oil, vitamin E, B-vitamins, lecithin and kelp. Over supplementing can cause a cat to refuse meals.

Ashley was our resident on felines and fresh meat diets. She knew this was the best way to maintain a long healthy life. Ashley passed away after 23 healthy and

happy years. Enjoy the following success stories regarding transitioning to a fresh food diet. If you have a cat story you would like to share, please send your email to, meg@megsmeats.com.

Proteus and Valentine

These two brothers were the official Meg's Meats greeters, however, until December 2003 they protested eating a fresh food diet. With the addition of fresh whole rabbit to the Meg's product line, they were once again presented with the prospect. This time, after a day of protest, they stopped their boycott and began to eat. They vomited occasionally during the first 2 weeks as they made the transition to a raw meat diet. Rabbit remained their favorite meal but they eventually expanded their diet to include venison, turkey, and sardines. Valentine passed in the spring of 2009 and Proteus joined him in the fall.

Grace, Truckee, Ca.

Lassie

At 9 weeks, Lassie was given a 50% chance of survival due to severe diarrhea and an upper respiratory infection. She was considered un-adoptable because of these health issues. Initially, I tried conventional processed foods but the diarrhea continued. Within 2 days of switching to a fresh meat diet, Lassie had normal stools for the first time in her young life. It took 4 weeks for Lassie to recognize bones as food instead of playing with them and now enjoys her bones in the comfort of a crate. This keeps her from dragging them all over the house. Now our little terrorist enjoys eating ground turkey, venison, cottage cheese, rabbit, and chicken necks with occasional pulped vegetables. Lassie is a healthy, happy, vibrant, lean, muscular, 6 month old kitten with normal stools. She still has an occasional sneeze, which is an indication that her immune system is developing. To support this development I have included salmon oil and kelp in her diet. Our darling little scamp now rules the house terrorizing and attacking her favorite pooch, Lucy. She can generally be found lounging on the television, tapping the screen when something interests her, and is fascinated when the bigger cats appear.

Kathy, Truckee, Ca.