

Feeding Your Cat from a Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medical (TCVM) Perspective

This page is not meant to provide complete nutritional information but simply provide alternatives regarding feeding options for your pet and ways of integrating Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medical information. It has been compiled through personal observations and experiences, Daverick Leggett's book *Helping Ourselves*, Mary Strauss's article in the *Whole Dog Journal*, "Having Dinner In" and "Now We're Cooking" and the Chi Institute's Food Energetic guidelines.

Feeding a proper diet can help our pets in so many ways and provide an effective way of preventing disease or helping balance our pets when they are afflicted with disease. What we feed our pets can help their immune systems fight infections or immune-based diseases, help fight cancer and help the digestive tract, especially in those prone to vomiting and diarrhea. Diet affects our pets' health, and it is the one thing you can change to positively influence your pets' well-being.

Cats are obligate carnivores, meaning they eat meat exclusively. This does not mean feeding muscle meat (such as hamburger) alone since this is high in phosphorus and low in calcium, making it an unbalanced meal. In the wild they would hunt and eat small mammals, ingesting the meat, bones, and internal organs. When feeding commercial diets, canned food is a better choice than kibble which is far removed from what cats would normally eat. Cats have particular needs including the need for taurine and arginine, which are amino acids naturally found in prey animals. These have been added to cat foods but are not found in flesh or organ meats. That is why it is more difficult to do a homemade cooked diet for cats and impossible to impose a meatless diet on cats. They do, however, do well with the commercially prepared raw foods that are nutritionally complete.

Modifications to your pet's diet

There are many ways to modify what we feed our pets and help them be more nutritionally balanced. Any time a diet change is done, do so gradually by introducing the new food or diet with what is being currently feed, and then slowly decrease the previously fed food while feeding more of the new food. This allows the gastrointestinal tract a chance to acclimate to the change. Whatever diet change you opt to do for your pet, it needs to be easy for your lifestyle and not too complex; otherwise, you won't be able to do it on an ongoing basis. It should also be economically feasible. The following are some changes you can consider making to your pet's diet:

- Decrease considerably or eliminate completely kibble and substitute canned food or a commercial raw diet
- Change kibble to better quality- that is, grain-free and more protein (see below for more information)
- 100% canned food supplemented with small amounts of meats (note that some cats enjoy small amounts of fresh vegetables and fruits)
- 50% canned food supplemented with 50% fresh meat, vegetables, grains and fruits
- Raw food – either fed 100% (feeding guidelines provided on package or websites) or supplement currently fed diet

Feeding Options

For guidelines on the benefits of feeding canned food, an excellent reference is Dr. Lisa Pierson's website www.catinfo.org and for general information on feline nutrition, please refer to www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc.

Kibble or Canned Food – How to choose a high quality food

Choosing a high quality food can be easy once you know what to look for. Ideally one or two animal proteins are the first few things listed, as all ingredients must be listed by weight. The animal protein should be named, not just listed

as “meat” or “by-products”. Ideally it should be grain free, but if there are grains in the food look for whole grains such as oat or barley, and vegetables. Avoid processed grains such as corn meal and brewer’s rice, fillers such as corn and soy, artificial preservatives such as BHSA, BHT and ethoxyquin and artificial colors. Tocopherols (a type of vitamin E), vitamin C and rosemary extract are okay, but note that food with natural preservatives won’t keep as long so check the “best by” date.

Note that higher quality kibble or canned food may be more available in pet stores, rather than supermarkets. These kibbles tend to be higher in protein, use better quality meats and are lower in carbohydrates, grains and additives. Because kibble is highly processed and is inherently a “warming” food, it may not be the preferred base for a pet’s diet and if fed, should be fed in small quantities. Kibble also tends to be higher in calories and thus, it can contribute to an overweight pet. In fact, many veterinarians recommend feeding exclusively canned food to cats. Canned food provides more moisture, is lower in carbohydrates and higher in meat-based protein, all of which are beneficial to cats.

Raw Food

Many pet stores now carry raw foods that are already prepared as frozen nuggets or patties that just need to be thawed and contain not just flesh but ground up and easy to digest bone pieces and some vegetables; these are complete and wholesome diets and many pets thrive on such diets. However, some pets may not do well with raw foods, because of raw food’s fat content or because the pet is immunosuppressed for the treatment of cancer or an immune-mediated disease. Note that for raw foods, either home-made or commercial, there is a small but not negligible potential for food-borne contamination with Salmonella or E. coli to the pet. Very few pets fed raw food contract infections from these bacteria. Some simple guidelines can minimize risks. Raw foods should not be allowed to sit out at room temperature for prolonged periods of time and foods that are not immediately ingested should be thrown out. Also, handling raw food must be done carefully with thorough hand washing, feeding from non-porous surfaces (ideally, stainless steel bowls), and avoiding contact with other food items in the kitchen. People who are immunosuppressed, on chemotherapy or afflicted with HIV should exercise extreme caution when handling raw foods.

Homemade Diets

It is difficult to make a home-made cat food due to their requirements for certain amino acids, most notably taurine and arginine. Therefore it is best to feed primarily a canned food diet and/or raw food with minimal to no kibble. If you do feed kibble, it should be of good quality and in small amounts. You can supplement your cat’s diet with small amounts of meat, and some cats will enjoy small amounts of fruits, vegetables and nuts added in as well.

How Much to Feed

An average cat needs 150-250 calories a day (less for those who are 100% indoors and/or sedentary and more for those who are indoor/outdoor or are more active). This intake should be divided into at least two feedings a day. Note that cats are NOT meant to eat continuously; in a wild state they can go some length of time between meals/kills. Most canned foods are about 30 calories per ounce which means an average cat will need 4-6 ounces of canned food a day, divided into 2-3 meals. If a cat is overweight and weight loss is desirable, it should be done slowly and should not exceed 1% of body weight per week. Even if your pet is at an ideal weight, it is important to monitor your cat’s weight on a regular basis since many diseases will cause weight loss even before the cat even acts ill. Weight checks can be done at your vet’s office or more conveniently and less stressfully at home, using a baby scale (check www.amazon.com for Salter 914 Electronic baby and toddler scale). Note that weighing yourself without and then with your cat and subtracting the difference is NOT sensitive enough to note your cat’s sleight weight variations.

The use of food in the prevention of disease and/or treating conditions

Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine (TCVM) describes food as possessing certain qualities such as warming or cooling (its inherent temperature) or having specific flavors that can act on the body in certain ways. The temperature of a food will influence the body by warming it up or cooling it down and the method by which food is cooked will influence its temperature. This information is useful when treating or managing certain conditions of imbalances of Heat or Cold in the body and so they can be used to help treat diseases. You will need to check with your TCVM-

trained veterinarian for guidance on which may be better choices for your pet based on the condition being treated. In general, warm conditions are treated with cooling foods and cool conditions are treated with warming foods.

It is important to note that any kibble tends to be highly processed, high in carbohydrate content, and is harder to digest, especially for older pets. If kibble is fed, it should be given in small quantities and should be of high quality. There are also guidelines when choosing a meat for feeding homemade or raw foods. Raw foods are cooling in nature and may be appropriate for some but not all pets. For a list of foods and their uses, please see our handout on [Food Energy](#) and [Food Actions](#).