

Your cat is a tiny tiger!!

It sounds silly but if you compare their behaviour and anatomy there is little difference other than size!

Chasing, stalking, ambushing and pouncing are all practice hunting behaviours. Their amazing sense of smell, exceptional low-light vision and camouflage coats are all to assist in the hunt too. Big cats also purr, roll around, sharpen their claws on trees, sleep a lot, play, groom...

Cat jaws and teeth are designed to eat a prey-based diet – large canines to capture, hold and kill; shearing molar teeth to cut through skin, meat and bone; and an up-and-down jaw action for cutting meat into chunks, not grinding plants.

Digestion of carbohydrates requires an enzyme called Amylase – cats don't produce this in their saliva, like omnivores do, so have a limited ability to digest grains and other carbohydrates. Cats get their energy from proteins and fats.

Cats of all sizes are obligate carnivores – they are designed to eat other animals. They are cats, not cows!!

Cats are descended from desert creatures so are designed to get most of their fluid intake from their prey, so rarely need to drink – fresh prey contains 65-75% moisture.

So whether big cats, or small, they hunt to catch prey for their food. They will eat virtually the entire carcass – meat, bone, skin, fur, gut, internal organs...as owners of hunting cats will know, often all that's left of a mouse is half the skull and the gallbladder!

Feed your cat a biologically, & species, appropriate natural diet

Cats should be fed a mixture of raw meat and bone, with additional supplements as required. Each cat is an individual so their requirements will vary.

As they are obligate carnivores cats require a meat and bone content of 85-95%!

A variety of meats should be fed – try not to stick to just one type (e.g. chicken), variety is the spice of life and feeding just one meat source will deprive your cat of certain nutrients.

Meat and bone are best fed ground up together. However small bones and chunks of meat are a brilliant addition to your cats diet. These not only form part of their meal, they encourage chewing and gnawing which exercises their jaw muscles and is great for teeth.

Bones should be chosen for suitability based on the size of your cat – wings, gizzards, and chopped bird carcasses are great. The more they chew, the less plaque will build up!

A natural prey-based diet also involves plenty of organ meat. This can include heart, liver, kidney and tripe.

Your cat will eat a smaller volume of food, if fed raw, as it is actually utilising most of its food!

Meal Frequency

Cats should be fed 2-4 times daily. Adult cats only require 2 meals, but young or older cats require more. Many adult cats do better on more regular, smaller meals, if possible.

Supplements

The extras added to a cats diet usually include eggs, various herbs, additional taurine and fish oils.

Taurine is found in meat but the quantities can vary greatly – supplementation avoids deficiency. Cats should only be fed fish-based oils as they cannot absorb omega 3 fatty acids properly from plants.

The Benefits of Raw feeding

- ✓ Improved digestion
- ✓ Reduced faecal odour and volume
- ✓ Healthy coat, less shedding, fewer hairballs
- ✓ Improved energy levels
- ✓ Better health, especially dental & urinary
- ✓ Weight loss, if overweight

Commercial Raw vs. Home-Prepared

There are lots of great, pre-mixed and ground, raw diets now commercially available. These are great as they are nutritionally complete and eliminate the need to handle raw products yourself.

Home-prepared diets can be great, but you need to know what you're doing to ensure your cat is getting all of its nutritional requirements. It can be a time-consuming process and requires plenty of freezer-space!

Why not just cook it?

Cooking degrades the nutrients in food, making it lose essential vitamins, minerals and amino acids (including infamous Taurine!). Cooking also changes the chemical composition of nutrients, making them less easily absorbed by your cat.

People often want to cook meats for their pets as they're concerned about the bacteria found on raw meats. Cats, like other carnivores, have a short digestive tract with a very acidic stomach pH, making it naturally resistant to pathogens.

What not to feed

- Cooked bones of any kind – these are indigestible and very dangerous!
- Fruits or vegetables, especially onions or garlic
- Chocolate
- Plant-based oils
- Milk (unless small amounts or raw, unpasteurised, unprocessed milk, ideally goat or sheep)

The dangers of a dry diet

The most important change to your cats diet is the complete removal of dry food.

Whether prescription, premium, or “natural”, all dry diets contain at least 25-50% carbohydrate. Some diets can be the equivalent of feeding meat flavoured cereal! Over prolonged periods this is detrimental to health as cats have no known dietary requirement for carbohydrates.

The other issues with a dry diet are:

- Low moisture content (<10%)
 - Due to a low thirst drive, cats on dry diets will consume <50% of the fluids a cat on a wet diet will. This causes chronic dehydration, leading to urinary and kidney issues
- Protein from plant, rather than animal sources
 - Cats require complete protein sources, like those in meat, fish and eggs, as these contain all the essential amino acids, including Taurine. Vegetables, legumes and grains are incomplete protein sources.
- Cause cats to overeat
 - The satiety centre in cats (the bit that tells them when they're full) is based on protein and fat. On a high carb diet cats can overeat, become obese, and develop diabetes amongst other diseases
- Predisposes to Inflammatory Bowel Disease
 - Due to a combination of the above
- Does not clean teeth!
 - This is unfortunately a myth

Is commercial wet food any better?

A lot of wet commercial diets are, unfortunately, also jam-packed with carbohydrates. They obviously have high water content but can otherwise cause similar issues.

Transitioning to a raw diet

Some cats take to a raw diet straight away, especially if very young. Others can take a fair bit of persuasion! It's totally worth it though so persevere and try some of the steps below to help.

Obviously the easiest thing to try is to offer your cat a small amount of raw food and see what happens! If your cat is free-fed a dry diet, the 1st step is to eliminate free-feeding. Also introduce a high protein canned food alongside the dry diet, to get them used to the texture of wet food. A lot of kibble fed cats are addicted!!

Your cat can go 8-12hrs between meals easily, but longer than this can be dangerous. Being a little hungry at mealtimes is beneficial when you want them to try a new food, so don't panic. Once dry food is eliminated, or in wet fed cats, you're trying to get them used to the new food so they associate the smell with dinner. Begin to offer the raw food next to, and then mixed into their current diet. If they continue to eat then slowly increase the raw portion each day, over a few weeks, until fully raw.

Tips and Tricks

- Ensure raw food is as fresh as possible – thaw in the fridge, leave out for no more than 20-30mins at a time, keep for no more than 48hrs
- Warm raw food in a warm water bath – the smell can tempt cats to eat
- Coat raw food or meaty chunks in a bribe topping, e.g. chopped cooked meat, crushed dry food, juice from water-packed fish etc.

For more information visit: www.feline-nutrition.org, or find one of the numerous books on raw feeding for cats

Natural Feeding for Cats



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