• Cats are carnivores and were never meant to eat high-carbohydrate diets
• Commercial diets – especially dry diets – are too high in carbohydrates
• Cats eating dry food are chronically dehydrated, and do not drink enough water to properly re-hydrate themselves
• Dry diets are not that helpful in preventing dental disease
• Experts are beginning to warn against feeding cats dry diets
• Feeding amounts vary from product-to-product and cat-to-cat.
• If your cat is addicted to dry food or is picky, it is important to make changes carefully – don’t let your cat stop eating in protest
• **LIST OF BEST DIETS ON LAST PAGE**

**Q. Dry food is best, right?**

A. Dry pet food is a dehydrated and processed mix of grains, meats, and added vitamins and minerals. Dry foods are typically 30-60% carbohydrate in composition. What isn’t well known among cat owners is that a requirement for carbohydrates has never been proven in cats (in contrast to dogs and people). **Cats are carnivores**, and in the wild eat nothing but meaty little rodents, bugs, birds and lizards. Our domesticated cats, on the other hand, are fed mixtures of meat and grain that produce a balanced diet over the long term. Many believe that those grains, aside from providing ‘artificial’ balance, may be contributing to problems in the long run.

**Q. Look, my cat is doing well on dry food. Why should I change?**

A. Cats descend from desert animals that depended on their food to provide needed water. Their kidneys are adapted to this desert environment to conserve water and concentrate the wastes into the urine. When cats don’t get enough water from food or additional water intake, some feel that cats spend much of their lives chronically dehydrated, which is not good for those kidneys or the rest of the body.

One common problem that seems to respond to more water in the food is the frustrating FUS, now called FLUTD (lower urinary tract disease) or interstitial cystitis (IC). Most doctors recommend feeding only canned food to these cats to increase water going into the body and out through the bladder. Could this be a signal that cats don’t do well on dry food?

Also, many people tend to leave dry food out all the time, leaving their cats to ‘free feed’. As convenient as it may be, this is a potentially harmful practice for the cat! Most cats given food all the time eat more than they should, and this practice is behind a growing epidemic of obese cats. And no, it doesn’t usually work to give them weight loss food free choice!
In addition, free feeding these high-carbohydrate meals has been suggested to contribute to the rising incidence of insulin resistance and diabetes in cats (Rand, 1998). Since this is a chronic, potentially dangerous problem that sometimes requires insulin injections for the rest of the cat’s life, this is a major concern.

Finally, many people have difficulty medicating their cats, and are forced to mix it in food. It’s much easier to mix medicine in canned food than in dry food. Cats who are addicted to dry food and won’t eat any canned food (a common problem) are a special challenge to medicate!

Q. I was always told to leave food out all the time. Doesn’t this decrease urine pH and prevent lower urinary tract disease?

A. It is true that eating small meals often lowers urinary pH. And cats are born to hunt constantly, catching little protein meals throughout the day. Remember, though, that dry food is not a meat protein like a lizard or mouse, and since it contains large amounts of carbohydrates (and often less fat) than real prey, we are essentially turning our cats into grazers.

Worse, hunting cats are expending mental and physical activity between kills, and must work hard for those meals. The only exercise our dry food ‘grazers’ are often getting is a jump off the couch!

Q. OK, but what about my cat’s teeth? Isn’t canned food bad for them?

A. Scientific evidence does say that cats eating canned food have worse teeth than cats eating dry food; however, if dry food were all that effective, we would not be seeing the large number of dental diets recently introduced to the market. Saying that dry cat food is great at preventing dental disease is like claiming that people could eat pretzels to maintain dental health! Teeth need proper nutrition (good quality diets increase all-around health and decrease susceptibility to gum disease), exercise (dental toys or safe meaty bones act like dental floss), and preventive treatment (brushing, where possible).

Q. How much should my cat eat?

A. Daily calorie needs for a cat vary based on several factors: activity, age, genetics, and health status. Also, all commercial cat foods have different calorie contents. This is even true within the same manufacturer. It is important to find what calorie needs your individual cat has (which may change), and feed each cat individually based on that calculation. The following chart is a guideline and should be adjusted on an individual-basis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cat Healthy Weight (lbs)</th>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Typical Indoor Cat</th>
<th>Weight Loss</th>
<th>Obese Prone</th>
<th>Weight Gain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Furthermore, every can contains a different calorie density. The following chart gives some common foods and calorie content.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diet</th>
<th>Calories / Can (5.5 oz)</th>
<th>Calories / Cup (dry)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EVO by Natura</td>
<td>200 – 236</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science Diet – Adult</td>
<td>163-178</td>
<td>493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Lives</td>
<td>147-176</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This chart is based on normal weight of cat. (Not actual weight if clinically overweight)*

Q. Well, maybe so, but I can’t get my cat to eat anything new!

A. Well, this is a problem. Cats easily become addicted to certain types of foods. Like people who become addicted to cigarettes or drugs, this isn’t always good for them. A cat willing to eat only one kind of food will be much more difficult to support nutritionally when sick and we are forced to feed them something different! In addition, recent findings by some feline veterinarians suggest that this feeding practice - offering only one kind of food for years on end - actually contributes to the development of food allergies in cats (or inflammatory bowel disease, which is often synonymous).

We recommend that all cats have a rotating diet, changing food types and food brands at least 2 to 4 times yearly. Cats are sometimes willing to go along with you on this, but if not, don’t force the issue by starving the cat. Cats who don’t eat are susceptible to a serious disease called fatty liver syndrome (hepatic lipidosis), which is a potentially fatal liver condition. If your cat is resistant to change, gradually try this technique:

1. If free feeding, slowly but surely reduce the availability of the food so that the cat is finishing what’s offered during two meal times during the day. In other words, if food is usually available 24 hours daily, make it available for 4 hours in the morning and 4 hours at night, then 2 hours in the morning and 2 at night, and finally for only ½ - 1 hour each time. Make sure to call your cat to meals so your cat doesn’t miss the opportunity to learn that a meal is available during set times of the day.

2. Once you have turned your free feeder into a meal feeder, start mixing the new food into the old food. If your cat isn’t interested, stop mixing the new food in and return to the old food.

3. Cut the amount of old food by 1/2 for ONLY 1 day. Your cat should become fairly hungry by the second day. This is when a cat is motivated to try the new taste, and you can once again begin mixing in the new food, very little at first and gradually increasing the amount.

4. If your cat does not eat the new mixture then, try cutting the amount of food offered by ¼ for 3 to 5 days, then add some of the new food.

Remember that the object is to increase your cat’s motivation to try something new without starving him or her – just inducing a mild feeling of hunger. DON’T let your cat lose weight,
and don’t push the issue too hard - some cats would rather get sick than switch. It’s best to work with your veterinarian’s scale during this process.

Advantages

The advantages to changing your cat’s eating habits are many-fold. By switching from free feeding dry food to meal feeding using canned with some dry, you can more easily control the amount and kind of food your cat gets. Cats fed this way are usually not as addicted to a single type of food, and rotating the diet will become much less stressful. And by rotating the diet, you will learn what foods your cat looks and feels best on. If your cat refuses to switch easily using the technique above, go ahead and give in, but keep thinking about how your next cat will be fed!
Q. After all this great information, what brands or foods do you suggest I feed my cat?

A. Cats should be fed a diet that is as close to their natural diet as possible. There is a trend in the pet-food industry towards this ideal. Most premium brands are adequate (especially in the canned form), but often substitute non-meat sources of protein. Examples of this are Fancy Feast and Science Diet which provide a good quantity of protein and moisture, but replace a significant amount with soy or wheat protein (to me this is unacceptable practice). There are only a handful of products at this time which I can stand behind as far as the above recommendations. Those include.

This list is only an opinion of Dr. Mixon based on veterinary training and continued research of available literature and studies. (as well as some common sense)

BEST
- A properly formulated nearly-rain high-protein home-cooked diet. (try www.balanceit.com if this appeals to you)

VERY GOOD (CANNED)
- EVO by Natura
- Wellness CORE (Wellness has other diets as well that are less ideal – so read label specifically for CORE)
- Blue Wilderness by Blue Buffalo (slightly lower in protein but still good)
- Weruva (does contain more carbs than ideal)
- A properly formulated high-protein home-cooked diet. (try www.balanceit.com if this appeals to you)

GOOD (CANNED)
- Those with cost concerns should try Fancy Feast (although significant portions of the protein have been replaced with soy protein to keep cost down)
- Premium canned diets such as Science Diet, Eukanuba, Pro-Plan – although none of these meet the higher protein criteria. (Beware: Science Diet often contains higher carbohydrates than other brands)

AVERAGE
- Premium Diets (Science Diet, Eukanuba, Pro-Plan) in dry
- Low-cost canned diets (significant amount of carbohydrates and non-meat protein)

POOR
- Low-cost dry diets