

Animal Hospital of Streamwood

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WHY CATS NEED CANNED FOOD

Cats are true carnivores, meaning that they require a meat-based diet for optimal health. They are exquisitely adapted to utilize fat and protein for energy. They are not at all like dogs and people, who are well adapted to use carbohydrates for energy. Canned cat food most closely mimics a cat's natural meat-based diet (mice, birds and rabbits which are primarily water, protein and fat with minimal carbohydrate). Canned foods contain as much as 55% protein, and as little as 8% or less carbohydrate. Dry foods are high in carbohydrates, as high as 50%, which are necessary for the manufacturing of dry kibble. When cats, who are not meant to metabolize carbohydrates, eat dry food they tend to store this carbohydrate energy as fat. This is why feeding dry food often results in obesity. Obese cats are at risk for diabetes, liver problems and arthritis. Research shows that cats will lose weight more efficiently on canned foods rather than dry foods. Even though they're often eating more calories, these diets are more suited to the unique feline metabolism. The canned food is therefore more easily digested and used by your cat's body. One of the great benefits of feeding canned food is as a preventative for these obesity related diseases.

The high water content of canned food increases a cat's overall fluid intake. Cats don't drink very much, so the extra water in canned foods helps to keep the kidneys and bladder healthy. The more water a cat takes in, the lower the risk of bladder stones/crystals and feline lower urinary tract disease (a common cause of painful urination and urination outside of the litterbox). Water in a diet is also more filling, which helps your cat maintain a healthy body weight while still feeling full.

Contrary to old beliefs, dry food does not clean your cat's teeth. In fact, dry food really has no benefits for cats. It has merely been a convenient way for people to feed cats. Recent research is revealing that canned food may be better for your cat's mouth than dry food. There is less periodontal disease in cats fed canned food instead of dry food. Of course, brushing your cat's teeth is still the best way to keep her mouth healthy and reduce tartar formation.

If your cat is not used to eating canned food, add it to the diet slowly in small amounts. It is so different in composition from dry food that it can cause tummy upset if not introduced slowly. Cats that won't eat canned food usually were not exposed to canned food early in life, or aren't hungry enough to try something new. Start by putting your cat on a meal-feeding schedule, feeding dry food twice daily. Once he's accustomed to the schedule, put a little canned food down first at mealtime instead of dry food. Most cats will be willing to try it at that point. Then begin mixing in more canned food and less dry food at each meal until your cat is eating all canned food. Feeding a variety of flavors and textures mimics the variety of a cat's natural diet and will prevent your cat from becoming finicky.

While you may spend a little more on food now, ultimately you'll save much more on medical care and your cat will be healthier and live longer.