

DEXTER'S DELI

PET HEALTH GUIDE

Ref. 5 v.6



Benefits

- Vibrant Skin & Coat
- Stable, Healthy Weight
- Healthy Digestion
- Improved Immune System
- Reduced Allergy Symptoms
- Healthy Teeth
- Proper Endocrine Balance
- Improved Energy and Behavior

Product Suggestions

Use these as enticements, whether mixed-in or sprinkled on top of new foods. Some freeze-dried options work best when crushed up. Bones broths add flavorful moisture.

- Weruva cat food pouches
- Inaba Churu tubes
- Inaba Grilled Fillets
- Cat Sushi Bonito Flakes
- Northwest Natural Functional Toppers
- Feline Naturals Treats
- Wild Meadow Egg Puffs
- Bone broth

SWITCHING CATS TO NEW FOODS

Convincing your cat to eat a healthier, more species-appropriate diet is a process.

THE KEY TO SWITCHING CATS TO A NEW FOOD IS LETTING THEM THINK IT'S THEIR DECISION. You can't force cats to eat, and if you stress out and push too hard you'll simply convince them that this new food really *is* a bad idea. Your cat may dive right in to the new food you offer, or they may take a month or two or three of slow encounters and taste testing. Cats are hardwired to fixate on certain foods, especially if they were fed a limited menu in early life. They aren't being finicky, they're being cats.

CAUTION: DON'T TRY TO STARVE YOUR CAT INTO EATING A NEW DIET. This can be dangerous, especially for obese cats. Fasting a cat for more than 24 hours (or even 12 for an obese cat) can cause *hepatic lipidosis*, a potentially fatal condition. Even a small amount of food will prevent this condition so take your time with meal changes and transition incrementally.

GOING TOO FAST MAY UPSET THEIR DIGESTION

Even if your cat loves the new food don't be too quick switching them to a completely different type of diet. If they get an upset stomach from a complete change in one meal you may end up with a cat that refuses to eat that "dangerous" food after all.

SWITCH FROM FREE FEEDING TO MEALTIMES FIRST

The habit of letting cats snack on a constantly available bowl of dry food is a hard habit to break but it's essential to shift away from this feeding style if you want to feed a healthier diet, whether canned or raw. The hunger that develops between meals will also help them accept new foods. Because you can't leave cooked or raw wet foods out all day you need to get your cat on scheduled meals. Healthy adult cats can eat twice a day, kittens and pregnant or lactating cats, or cats with liver or pancreas problems need more frequent meals.

Plan to offer food 2 to 3 times a day. Put their food down for 30 minutes, then pick it up. Because some cats won't eat "old" food you may find this frustrating, but if you shift slowly and don't put down too much at a time you won't waste much in the process. If you have a busy or multi-pet household you should watch your cat and see if part of the problem with scheduled meals could be that they'd prefer a quieter mealtime, then find a way to provide a more private space for those cats to eat in. Some cats prefer their food in toys designed to encourage hunting and foraging, and this provides mental enrichment too.

LET THEM SMELL IT OUT

Cats are very scent oriented when it comes to food. Any food you're trying to stop feeding should be put away in a sealed container where they can't get at it (the further away the better). The goal is to reduce their fixation on that scent being associated with eating, and to reorient their habit to the new food smells. Letting them see and smell new foods while they are eating their old diet helps them to make this change. Warming the new foods will

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Learn More

Pet Health Guides

- *Why Raw Food*
- *Why Wet Food For Cats*
- *Raw Food Basics*

Check out these books

- *Whole Health for Happy Cats*
- *Your Cat*
- *Real Food for Dogs & Cats*

Reliable online resources

- feline-nutrition.org
- littlebigcat.com
- catinfo.org



improve their smell, and it especially useful when it's been refrigerated. Don't microwave food, just put it in a small container or ziplock bag and float it in a bowl of warm water for a few minutes. Expect them to *not* eat it at first; you are still helping them associate this strange new food with mealtime. Don't be discouraged or frustrated if this process goes on for many weeks; some cats switch eagerly but others take 2-3 months to work through this process. Try not to hover and worry when they approach the food, you don't want negative emotions to be associated with mealtimes.

DRY to WET

Some cats that have lived all their lives on dry food find it very challenging to switch to anything wet. Be prepared for the possibility that the switch to canned will take some time; sadly they can be addicted to dry food even though it's the least healthy diet format for cats.

Start by putting their food on a plate instead of a bowl. This allows for full whisker freedom, helping them to avoid getting their whiskers in the "nasty" wet food and improving their feeding comfort overall. This also allows for a dab of wet food to be placed on the plate near their dry food. This method of putting a new food beside the existing food allows them to become accustomed to the scent, and to choose to sample the wet food.

Once they're willing to lick the wet food you can begin to increase the amount (every few days or few weeks) You can also try putting some dry food right on top of the wet food, so even if they pick it off they'll get a tiny taste of the new wet food. Experiment with different canned food styles and meats. Include stew-type foods so they can experience the unique mouth feel of chunks of meat. If they really aren't interested in the "cat food" add un-spiced cooked meat or meat baby food into their existing food, then slowly, a quarter teaspoon at a time, start to mix in the nutritionally balanced wet food.

WET to RAW

Once your cat is on scheduled meals and eating their wet food for a few weeks you can start helping them to accept raw food. Raw food doesn't smell anything like canned food, and since we know that cats are really into how their food smells they can't be expected to automatically try raw simply because the texture is similar. Start by mixing a tiny amount, one-quarter of a teaspoon, into their wet food. In addition put a small amount on their plate, near their current food (don't forget to warm it up). This helps them get used to the scent and associate it with mealtime, and will allow you to see if they're up for trying it on it's own. Use the same process as described above for dry to wet changes.

OFFER VARIETY

Be sure to offer different meats when integrating canned or raw food into your cat's diet. Not only is variety important for nutrition, it may make it easier to switch your cat. If they become fixated on a single raw diet offer the new varieties on the side, just as we recommend when first offering any new food.

ENTICING TOPPINGS

To encourage the most finicky cats you can experiment with dusting the new and existing food with their favorite dry treat (fish flakes, grated parmesan, or freeze-dried meat treats), or even the dry food they can't give up. While it's often recommended to avoid fish during this process because of its generally over-the-top enticement rating, you may need to use it if your cat is especially reluctant or already a fish flavor addict. Bonito flakes are convenient, especially when you crush them up for dusting over and mixing into their current food.