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Much to digest about cat food

Each time I walk into a pet store or walk down the pet food aisle in a grocery store, I am amazed at the variety and number of brands of pet foods on the market.

Additionally, there are many therapeutic diet products that are sold only at veterinary clinics, and raw and organic diets sold through specialty markets and on the Internet. The choices are overwhelming.



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dom the case.

If you speak to breeders, veterinarians and pet food manufacturers, no one will agree on the best pet diet. Everyone who deals with pet nutrition has opinions on diets based on research, experience feeding the product, and reading promotional materials from the manufacturers.

While I am not going to recommend any specific products, I do want to share some of my opinions.

Kittens should be fed a combination of canned and dry food. If a kitten does not have a delicate digestive tract, I think it is a good idea to also vary



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Food labels often contribute to over-feeding. A typical healthy adult cat needs only 200-250 calories daily.

brands. Kittens are like human children: If they are exposed to various textures, tastes and sizes of food, they will be less picky as adults.

Once a kitten has been sterilized, its metabolic rate drops dramatically and caloric needs decline significantly. Sterilized kittens 6 months and older can be switched to adult maintenance diets. Healthy adult cats also do well on a combination of dry and canned food.

The time between 6 and 18 months is critical for a kitten to reach full size, and full size often becomes oversized even at these young ages. I think that only about 25 percent of cats eat appropriate amounts if given unlimited access to dry food. This means that 75 percent will overeat if allowed.

An average adult cat needs 200-250

calories daily, and this would include dry food, canned food and any treats or snacks.

You might be surprised to know:

- Iams Indoor Cat Hairball Care diet: 365 calories per cup
- Science Diet Nature's Best Chicken diet: 420 calories per cup
- Purina ONE Chicken and Rice: 452 calories per cup
- Wellness CORE: 536 calories per cup
- 3-ounce can of Fancy Feast: about 95 calories
- 5.5-ounce can of Friskies: about 140 calories

Forget about reading the feeding guides on cat food bags. All of them suggest feeding much larger portions than a house cat needs. If you look at the above examples, you'll see that feeding your cat half a measured cup of dry food daily (if all he or she eats is dry food) is too much for the highly caloric foods.

If you feed 3-ounce canned, then you can only feed $\frac{1}{4}$ measured cup of dry food daily if you want to keep your cat fit. If you have an overweight cat or extremely sedentary cat, portioning food and using lower calorie products is more critical.

Stay tuned, cat owners. I'll have more suggestions for feeding your cat, controlling portions and weight loss in my next column.