

CATS: TIPS FOR SWITCHING TO FRESH FOOD

Cats who have eaten nothing but dry food or even canned food are often a challenge to switch to fresh food. They are very opinionated and imprint on food at an early age. Cats who eat other foods (real meat, fruits, vegetables, cheese) will be much less of a project. It might take days, or it might take months. It's worth the effort! Cats will starve themselves, and they are not good candidates for the tough love approach. Some very serious conditions can occur if cats do not eat for an extended period of time. Veterinarians who focus on food in their practices find that cats on fresh food diets do not have crystal and other pH problems: their urine is naturally, correctly balanced.

Slow and successful method:

Move away from a dry food diet and toward more canned food. Consider dry food to be a snack only, not left out all the time. Mix a very small (1/4 teaspoon or less) amount of food into an entire can of canned food. Work your way up slowly. Offer bits of other kinds of fresh food that you are eating. They may be refused, but one day...they won't. Cats of our acquaintance have taken from 6 months to a year to totally switch, but many are much faster. This method may be used with dry food too: in that case use an even smaller amount of new food in a small amount of dry food. Some people have success putting that tiny bit of food under one corner of a small serving of dry food. The canned approach works better, but if your cat absolutely refuses canned food it will be the way you start.

If you can skip the transition from dry to canned to fresh, that's great, but if you can't, then if you can at least get to mostly canned, with just a couple of tiny snacks of kibble, things will be much improved.

Some things to consider:

- *Cat whiskers are very sensitive.* If food is served in a bowl that interferes with whiskers it could be enough to keep the cat from considering the food. A flat dish works well.
- *Cats generally prefer their food between room temperature and body temperature.* You can add warm water, or warm the food in a baggie submerged in warm water. At the beginning, that small amount of new food will not greatly affect the temperature of the whole dish of canned food. One of the factors involved is smell: the food cats are used to eating is designed to be very smelly. They choose food by smell, and fresh food is a lot less fragrant than a commercial food they have been eating. Warming the food releases the flavors and fragrances. This is often the reason that the second half of the can of food is refused -- the first time it was not cold!
- *Leave the food out for no more than an hour after serving.* If you have dogs, you know what to do with leftovers!.
- *Trickery has been known to work with cats:* put the food on YOUR plate, or hide it in a location cats know to be forbidden...creativity helps!

Even if you never get all the way to raw food, if you get stuck at canned, (could happen) your cat will be eating a better balance of fat/protein/carbohydrate. Their diet will be fully hydrated, which is very important. In that case you will need to find a way to simulate the live nutrients that are missing: green stuff (cat grass is popular, kits are available or it's often available in the produce section) and digestive enzymes, and possibly a variety of raw oils of animal origin. It takes a very small quantity of dry green stuff to do the job, and it's easy to over do, which can cause urine pH to get too high, and cause some of the problems you're trying to get away from! Tiny pinches of dry green stuff go a long way.

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