

Diets for Diabetic Cats

by Elizabeth Hodgkins DVM, JD

<http://www.yourdiabeticcat.com>

One of the questions that diabetic cat owners ask most frequently is “what should I feed my cat?” It is an excellent question, because diet is the cornerstone of health for all cats, but especially the diabetic cat. As a result, there are many pages of recommendations written elsewhere about the nutrient composition of diets for diabetic cats. Unfortunately, great deal of this information is imprecise, at best. What we know about most pet foods, and what is published about the nutrient content of cat foods on other sites, is simply a compilation of information supplied by the pet food companies about their own products (this is because of the high cost of actually conducting independent laboratory tests on each food independently). This nutrient information is NOT the result of third-party testing of current “runs” of these foods produced by those companies. In fact, the information provided by pet food manufacturers is often years-old and hardly representative of the food you are planning to purchase at the supermarket or pet food warehouse today. Often enough, the formulation of the food you buy with has a very different ingredient composition from the food with that same name that was tested for publication months or years earlier. Even when published information is recent, you cannot rely on the pet food companies to report the nutrient content of their products accurately. A very good example of this is the carbohydrate content claims made by a company that manufactures a new, “low carbohydrate” dry cat food. The company claims that its food is 7% carbohydrate. Actual nutrient analysis of this food conducted by the author shows that the carbohydrate content is 13%, almost twice the amount stated by the company, and that carbohydrate is doubly harmful because it is from highly processed potato! Relatively small differences between foods, for example and most importantly, the carbohydrate content of a food on a “percent of calories” basis, cannot be relied on unless the very cans of food on the store shelves have themselves been tested for this value. Needless to say, it would be highly impractical for pet owners to test every case of food they buy! What is important about this information is the idea that we simply cannot rely on information from pet food companies when we make decisions about what food to feed our diabetic cats. You are kidding yourself if you believe that the numbers on pet food nutrient content charts based on pet food company information really tell you what is going into your cat. So, does this mean the situation is hopeless?? Absolutely not. What it means is that you will want to rely on a completely different set of criteria when you select the food for your cat. What are those criteria?

1) First and foremost, always choose a canned, pouched, or raw meat diet for your cat. No type, brand or variety of dry food is acceptable for any cat, but especially not for any diabetic cat!! This includes every single food that is labeled as “for diabetics” (such as Hills m/d dry, Purina DM dry and Innova Evo dry). I CANNOT emphasize this point enough. I have had several clients whose diabetic cats have been released from their dependence on insulin who subsequently relapsed because their people believed what they read on a bag of dry cat food. There is simply NO dry cat food, and there likely never will be any dry cat food that will be an appropriate food for diabetic cats!

2) Look for a food that contains little or NO cereals, vegetables or fruits of any kind. Some of the most expensive of the “wet” cat foods available today contain hideous amounts of completely unnecessary

plant-derived ingredients like corn, corn flour, corn grits, corn gluten, rice, rice flour, wheat, wheat gluten, soy protein, potato, sweet potato, carrots, apples, cranberries, blueberries and similar. These ingredients might be part of a well-balanced human diet, but they have no place in the diet of even a healthy cat, much less a cat already debilitated by the ill effects of a high-carbohydrate diet. Pet food companies put these ingredients in their canned foods because they are cheap and plentiful, and because they appeal to the pet food buyer's mistaken ideas about what is "good food" for cats. These ingredients have no scientifically-demonstrated value for the cat; in fact these ingredients contribute unacceptable amount of carbohydrate, sugar, and fiber (gastrointestinal residue) that the cat is not equipped to handle. The use of these ingredients is solely the result of corporate profitability and marketing considerations!

3) Find foods that have a predominance of acceptable meat ingredients, like chicken, turkey, and beef, or even meat-by-products, that your cat likes. Palatability is very important because your cat can only benefit from foods that it is willing to eat. Meat by-products have been given a "bad rap" by pet food companies that wish to market their vegetable ingredients successfully against meat-based foods. The fact is that meat-by-products in most canned foods are nothing more or less than the wholesome parts of meat animals that humans do not usually consume. For example, the clean spleens, lungs and udders of meat-animals would be discarded in most parts of the world if they could not be included in pet foods. They are perfectly acceptable meats for pets, if handled properly. As I have told many of my clients, I would much prefer my cats eat such by-products than corn, rice, potato or other vegetable ingredients.

4) Having just stated that wet foods with meat ingredients are acceptable for the feline diabetic, I nonetheless always suggest to my clients that they consider feeding at least some fresh, raw or lightly cooked meat to their diabetic cats. My own cats eat ONLY raw meat and, while this is not mandatory for good results in the diabetic cat, it is a very good way to provide some of the natural, unprocessed nutrition the cat evolved to utilize best. While some carbohydrate-addicted cats do not take readily to meat, many diabetic cats seem to instinctively recognize unprocessed meat as their natural diet. It is fun to watch a pet "attack" a meat diet with the same zest that its ancestors displayed after a successful hunt! To summarize: Diabetic cat owners should not become slaves to pet food nutrient charts. Such charts are, by their very nature, inaccurate, incomplete (new foods come along every day) and self-serving to the pet food companies. You simply cannot be sure to make the very best food choices for your cat by this method. Foods which charts may show as "lower in carbs" than others may not actually be lower in carbs and other nutrients listed. It is much more sensible to understand the basic rules of cat food selection as these rules apply to all foods, whether they are listed on charts or not, and whether those charts are accurate or not. After working with a great many diabetic cats, and watching them achieve good remissions on a great many diets, (even some that did not rate as well on charts as others), I am convinced that common sense and a few basic "rules" work extremely well in helping pet owners make good choices when they shop for foods for their diabetic kitties.