

Your vet can prescribe a food which will improve your cat's health condition.

FOOD SPECIAL

Eating for health

Veterinary foods can make a real difference to health conditions, as Nicole Paley explains.

Balanced nutrition is an essential part of an active, healthy lifestyle for your cat but diet can also play an important role when your cat is poorly, providing nutritional support at a time when he needs it most.

With a variety of diets developed to address a range of specific health needs, nutritional support may be a component of a care plan recommended by your vet. Nicole Paley of the Pet Food Manufacturers' Association (PFMA) looks at how nutritional support may be able to help your cat and gives some tips on how you can make the most of your consultation with the vet.

Which medical conditions can benefit from nutritional support?

There is a range of special diets for a number of conditions including urinary health, skin and food allergies, diabetes, gastrointestinal, joint support, heart and renal. While nutrition can play an important role in maintaining your cat's health, it'll be an element of an overall treatment plan recommended by your vet – a special diet must be on their recommendation and with their ongoing supervision.

How does nutritional support work?

Feline hypothyroidism for example, is a common endocrine disorder in cats, most often diagnosed in cats over the age of ten. While it is a serious health condition, it's very manageable with the right veterinary treatment. A component

of the care plan may be a switch in diet to one specially designed to support cats with thyroid problems. A special diet will limit the dietary iodine intake to reduce thyroid hormone production.

Another example is kidney disease where a special diet can play a crucial role in reducing the build-up of waste products which would normally be removed by healthy kidneys. A special diet can help provide nutritional support for the disease by reducing the amounts of protein and phosphorus in your cat's food. Phosphorus restriction seems especially important in helping to manage the clinical signs.

How to move your cat onto a new diet

If your vet recommends a change in diet as part of your care plan, following these tips should mean a smoother journey:

1. Begin the transition by mixing his current food with the new cat food. Gradually decrease the amount of the current cat food while increasing the amount of new cat food. Continue to do this over a seven-day period. Transitioning slowly can result in fewer digestive issues and better acceptance of the new cat food.
2. Remember to be patient. For finicky or older cats, or those with health conditions, the transition time could take ten days or slightly longer.
3. For certain health conditions, such as acute gastrointestinal issues, your vet may want you to start the diet straight away without any transition.
4. Make sure you discuss transitioning your cat food in detail with your vet.

Questions you should ask your vet

1. Are there any foods I should avoid giving my cat because of his condition?
2. How could human food affect your cat's health?
3. If you prefer to feed a specific form of cat food (wet/canned, dry or both), speak to your vet about it as he or she may be able to recommend a food that complements and addresses your cat's condition.
4. How much and how often should you feed the recommended food to your cat?
5. What is your vet's advice for transitioning him onto the new diet?
6. Discuss which treats you can feed your cat with the recommended food.
7. How quickly should you expect to see signs of improvement in your cat's condition?
8. If you have multiple cats can you feed them all the same food?
9. How long will you need to feed the recommended food for?
10. Ask whether you will need a follow-up appointment. ■

For accurate diagnosis and treatment options, always speak to your vet.

Take care to change your cat's diet carefully.

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