



# Natural Diet

This is in rebuttal co-written by Anne Jablonski, whose open letter to veterinarians on the issue of cat nutrition is available at [Cat Nutrition](#) and Michelle Bernard, author of *Raising Cats Naturally*, of a paper written by the "scientists" at [Purina](#) about the "dangers" of raw meat. To read more about the dangers of commercial cat food, see both [Cat Nutrition](#) (<http://www.catnutrition.org>) and [Blakkatz](#).

## DANGERS OF RAW MEAT

**Purina:** Myths about proper diets for our dogs and cats seem always to be with us. Some of these myths may have a grain of truth, but this truth is often greatly exaggerated or misapplied. Other myths are nurtured by misinformation and mistrust.

**Anne and Michelle:** While some myths may have a grain of truth, what is true is that commercial pet foods are loaded with grains. This is not exaggerated or misapplied, but the honest truth. That their food is 100 percent nutritionally complete is a myth. Commercial pet food should be approached with a great deal of mistrust.

**Purina:** A current myth that could be threatening to our pets' health involves raw meat diets for dogs and cats. The proponents of this belief question the wholesomeness and nutritional value of commercial pet foods. But, in fact, there is no scientific substantiation for raw meat diets.

**Anne and Michelle:** This is simply not true. Look at [Pottenger's](#) cats as well the material presented by the numerous breeders (mostly dogs unfortunately) who have been feeding a raw meat diet for generations. Saying that there is no scientific substantiation for raw meat diets for dogs and cats is akin to saying that there is no scientific substantiation that a squirrel should eat nuts and seeds. Common sense.

While we are not scientists, we sometimes wear white coats when we prepare our cat food. It makes us feel more qualified to make cat food, but our cats do not seem to enjoy their food any more or less. Unlike pet food manufacturers, our cats do not suffer through horrible experiments to discover data that are readily available. In order to determine the nutritional needs of small cats, for example, all these researchers need to do is to analyze the natural prey of small cats. These values will tell them, beyond a doubt, what is necessary to keep a small cat healthy. Unfortunately, pet food manufacturers would never be able to prepare commercial food based these data. It would be too expensive and they wouldn't be able to use their multitude of carbohydrate ingredients as a cat's natural prey is almost completely carbohydrate-free. Without the pet food industry to make use of slaughterhouse waste, there would be virtually no profit for those involved in the mass production of cheap, convenience foods for domesticated cats and dogs. That's an economic

the cats  
kittens  
natural diet  
homeopathy  
vaccinations  
natural rearing  
map  
home

truth, that no amount of fear-mongering and misinformation about raw diets can change.

**Purina:** The truth is that good quality pet foods are backed by years of feline and canine nutrition studies. They are the result of scientific studies by researchers in veterinary colleges and animal nutritionists at reputable pet food manufacturers. Ralston Purina Company, for example, began its pet nutrition studies over 70 years ago. This work continues as researchers launch new studies to learn even more about the relationship of diet to our pets' health.

**Anne and Michelle:** Yes, these very successful pet food manufacturers have been around for many, many years. When was the last time you heard of a pet food manufacturer going bankrupt or suffering a loss? They do not; in fact, pet food manufacturers have very lucrative businesses. They know exactly what is necessary to properly feed a cat, but they ignore this information in favor of manufacturing and selling an inferior product that does not truly meet a cat's nutritional needs. It's intriguing to ponder why companies like Ralston Purina, with over 70 years of experience, opt to base pet food formulations on studies that determine the minimal nutrients needed to sustain life, rather than the scores of scientific studies on animal nutrition that could guide them to using ingredients that would make a more sound, balanced, and species-appropriate diet on which animals can actually thrive and fight off disease.

**Purina:** In our own diets, meat is combined with vegetables, fruits, breads and other foods to give us the balanced nutrition we need. If we were to eat one particular food consistently, chances are we would become malnourished or develop health problems. No single food or food group can provide all the nutrients we need in proper proportions. Manufacturers of good quality pet foods have incorporated all the nutrients a dog or cat needs during a particular lifestage into nutritionally complete and balanced diets.

**Anne and Michelle:** Yes, in our own diets (as in we humans), we should combine meat with vegetables, fruits, breads, etc., but as best we can tell, cats are not humans, therefore, they shouldn't be fed like humans. Cats are obligate carnivores. Their natural diet consists almost exclusively of meat from small prey animals. Wild cats have survived for eons consuming prey animals, from weaning to old age. They do not need food for any particular life stage. If the food prepared by pet food manufacturers was correct to begin with, they would not need kitten, adult, senior, indoor, outdoor, urinary tract, sensitive stomach, weight control, hairball, etc. formulas. Cats consuming commercial cat food, especially dry food, are malnourished! If they were fed properly, they would not suffer from the multiple illnesses that are tied directly to long-term commercial pet food consumption, such as diabetes, inflammatory bowel disease and urinary tract disorders.

**Purina:** Although meat is a source of protein, it has very low levels of calcium, a mineral our pets require for proper bone and tooth development. Calcium also plays an important role in blood clotting, muscle contraction and transmission of nerve impulses.

**Anne and Michelle:** Yes, meat is a source of protein and that's what cats need in their diet - protein from meat, not from grains. Cats also

need calcium in their diet. A mouse is not meat alone. Anyone with any sense should know that. A properly balanced diet consists of meat and bone in proper proportions (called a calcium to phosphorus ratio "Ca:P"). Calculating a proper Ca:P ratio does not take a scientist. You simply prepare food for your cat from whole animals (as in chicken or rabbit) or from chicken, turkey or rabbit parts. If you do not prepare food with bone, you need to add a sufficient amount of bone meal to correct the ratio. There is an excellent Ca:P ratio available [on-line](#).

There is a very clever slight of hand here by Purina — and one that is parroted regularly by uninformed veterinarians who, sadly, turn to the pet food industry rather than their own clinical textbooks when it comes to doling out nutritional advice. They note that "raw meat diets" have the potential to be unbalanced, but fail to mention that no raw diet proponent worth his or her salt would ever advocate a diet that consists of only raw meat and that is not balanced with a calcium source, organs, and a few essential supplements.

**Purina:** It's important to remember that nutrients do not work alone, and calcium is no exception. Mineral nutrients are interrelated. Calcium and phosphorus have a scientifically established relationship in the formation of bones and teeth, provided a proper balance is maintained. This balance is usually not present in meat. If large quantities of raw meat are fed over time, skeletal problems may develop.

**Anne and Michelle:** Exactly, and this is why a properly prepared raw meat diet consists of meat with bone. Most commercial pet foods use an inferior (and inexpensive) calcium source such as calcium carbonate. The calcium that may come from the rendered by-product that they use in their food is cooked. Cooking meat destroys many of the nutrients that your cat needs to thrive. No, the balance is not present in meat alone, you must prepare meat with bone.

**Purina:** We tend to think of liver as being a "healthy" meat. Served with other foods, it is a beneficial part of many human diets. Liver has a high level of vitamin A, a fat-soluble vitamin that is stored by the body. When liver is fed to pets in large quantities over a period of time, vitamin A toxicity can result. This can lead to improper bone development, lameness and bone decalcification.

**Anne and Michelle:** Cats consume prey animals on a daily basis that have livers. 1,000 grams of mouse carcass contains 20,000 to 30,000 IU vitamin A. There have been instances of vitamin A overdose in cats, therefore, you should not feed your cat excessive amounts of liver. In addition to the risk of vitamin A overdose, it may lead to diarrhea. There was a study conducted wherein cats were fed a diet containing 150 to 300 times the vitamin A requirement for a period of three to four years with no ill effects. See this study on [Purina's own site!](#)

A mouse has a liver, your cat should consume liver on a daily basis as vitamin A is very important to cats for proper immune function, however, the amount of vitamin A your cat consumes in a week should not exceed 30,000 IU. There is a wonderful calculator on-line that will tell you how many IU of vitamin A is in many different types of raw meat. Check out this wonderful, free on-line [tool](#).

**Purina:** Raw meat carries the threat of bacteria and parasites.

Salmonella is a bacterial organism that can cause a variety of disease in humans and animals. The risk of salmonellosis is always present when pets are fed raw meat diets. Certain species of tapeworm can be found in raw meat and passed on to a pet who ingests the meat.

**Anne and Michelle:** Cats, because they are carnivores, are designed to consume a raw meat diet. Cats are not susceptible to salmonella poisoning. Cats have short, acidic digestive systems. Food passes through a cat's system quicker than a human's - humans retain food twice as long as a cat. A human consuming a raw meat diet would be susceptible to salmonella poisoning. If consuming a proper diet, food does not sit around in a cat's digestive system allowing bacteria to reproduce. Many pet food manufacturers add ingredients to slow the transit time of food. This is because it increases digestibility of the food and so that the cat is not producing large amounts of stool. Slowing the transit time of food through a carnivore's digestive tract is mucking around with how Mother Nature designed the cat. In over ten years of feeding an exclusively raw meat diet to my numerous cats, none have ever become ill from consuming raw meat. In an article written by Patrick L. McDonough, M.S., Ph.D. he states that,

"Clinical salmonellosis in cats is relatively uncommon and few references to it exist in the scientific literature. Cats appear to be highly resistant to salmonella infection unless they are stressed by overcrowding, dietary changes, transport, hospitalization, antimicrobial therapy, or concurrent illness at the time of salmonella exposure. The source of the salmonella is most likely to be either contaminated feed, water, or carrier animals (whether clinically ill or healthy). Contamination can arise from rodent or bird feces, raw or undercooked or contaminated meat and table scraps, or commercially prepared foods that are contaminated during processing."

**Purina:** High quality commercial pet foods are carefully processed to protect against salmonella or internal parasite infection.

**Anne and Michelle:** Maybe, but commercial pet food does expose your cat to mycotoxins, another potential side effect of the use of grains in cat food. Mycotoxins are naturally occurring fungal by-products that can cause disease and death in dogs and cats. When grains are improperly stored, mycotoxins can develop. It would appear that "high quality commercial pet foods" are also carefully processed to protect against long term good health.

**Purina:** It's true that cats and dogs consume a certain amount of muscle meat when they eat wild animals for survival. However, they also consume the bones, intestinal contents and internal organs which come closer to providing a complete and balanced diet.

**Anne and Michelle:** Voila, you see, they understand how a carnivore really eats, except, unless they are really hungry, if a cat can avoid eating the digestive organs of they prey animal, they do. The digestive organs of a mouse are very, very small. You will note that they state, *they eat wild animals for survival* — **NOT** grains!

**Purina:** Attempting to supplement a raw meat diet with vitamins and minerals is risky for your pet's health. Certain vitamins and minerals react

with one another. Unless they are present in the proper amounts a pet may suffer malnutrition.

**Anne and Michelle:** And cats consuming commercial cat food are not malnourished? Think again. It is not difficult to calculate the nutrients your cat needs to thrive and then replicating the information into a diet using ingredients from animal sources if at all possible. Pet food manufacturers use numerous ingredients from plant sources (as in grains and vegetable oils) to provide "proper" nutrition for your cat. Cats, because they are obligate carnivores, have difficulty using nutrients from plant sources. Ingredients from animal sources are much more expensive than those from plant sources.

**Purina:** A final thought

When a myth involving pet nutrition is suddenly exploited, we should ask ourselves: "What scientific research supports this statement?" "Have veterinary colleges done research to validate it?" "Do respected researchers in the fields of canine and feline nutrition support it?" "They said" or "I heard that" do not provide the substantiation we need when confronted with myths involving the nutrition and well-being of our special companions.

**Anne and Michelle:** Who is going to pay for this research? The pet food manufacturers? Of course not. Then their product would be shown to be completely inferior. As for the veterinary community, the truly useful work on nutrition that has been done is apparently largely ignored. There are scores of articles in the Journal of the American Veterinary Association on nutrition-the most notable being Dr. Debra Zoran's recent work on the specific metabolic consequences of the cat as carnivore. Yet the mainstream veterinary community seems instead preoccupied with reading about the latest drug protocol to treat a disease, rather than educating itself on how to properly feed the animals under their care so they might avoid many diseases to begin with. There are several books about diet written by veterinarians. We do not need colleges, researchers or scientists to tell us how to feed our children do we?

An [Adobe Acrobat](#) copy of this article is available for your convenience.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

---

Written and maintained by [Michelle T. Bernard](#)  
Last modified 11/11/2004 18:18:20