

# What to Feed Kitty

*by Christie Montgomery - Maine Coon Adoptions*

There are a lot of view points about what to feed cats. Christie Montgomery, a behavioral consultant for many rescue groups, including Maine Coon Adoptions, has solved numerous behavioral and health problems for our kitties with her diet and behavioral recommendations. We are grateful and indebted to her, and we wanted to share her point of view with you.

Let's take a real common sense look at a cat's diet. What do feral, stray or even wild cats eat when not being fed by humans? First, they do not go to a farmer's field to grab an ear of corn or stalk of wheat for breakfast, nor do they wander into the rice paddies for lunch and dinner. Yet, these grains and others are being marketed as appropriate nutrition for your feline friend. Cats, whether large or small, are strict meat eaters. For ex-ample, free-roaming domestic cats eat small birds, a mouse or small rat, a small rabbit, or an occasional lizard. So, look at the ingredients in your cat's food and then ask, "Would a feral, stray or wild cat eat that?" In order to keep your Furry Feline Friend healthy, happy and long-lived, learn to read the labels on cat food, just as you read labels on your own food. The words "natural" or "premium" or "vet recommended" are not necessarily indicative of high quality. If you or a family member needs help with nutrition, you are referred to a nutritionist not to your family doctor, so do not expect your vet to know all about feline nutrition.

Pet food manufacturers annually spend millions of dollars in marketing aimed at pet owners. For example, one cat food is marketed for "Inside Cats." Is the digestive tract of an "inside cat" any different than of an "outside cat"? The answer is "no," but it sounds good to the average pet food buyer.

Since the conclusion is that cats need meat, your cat food should contain mostly meat. Look for a muscle meat (preferably, not an organ meat) as the first ingredient. A muscle meat will be listed as "chicken," or "turkey," etc., **not** "chicken by-products" or "chicken by-product meal," or "chicken broth", "liver", or "chicken meal." The term "chicken meal" denotes that it has been cooked for a long time at very high temperatures and is of lower quality than less processed meat (often beaks and feet - little or no protein). By-products can include feet, intestines, feathers, egg shells, etc. and are much less nutritious than meat.

Dry food usually contains rice, corn, wheat, beet pulp, soy and/or grain gluten. Cats have short intestines and cannot digest these foods properly. Ninety-nine percent of cats do not drink enough water, and they use up more water resources when fed dry food because they have to reconstitute the dry food. So, dry food can actually cause dehydration in cats.

Many people think that dry food is good for a cat's teeth - however, the products in dry food are, in fact, not good for teeth - it's akin to humans chewing on sandpaper for our teeth - it is abrasive and wear away the enamel on the teeth. So, cats do better with a canned food diet as long the canned food contains mostly meat. **THINK MEAT when feeding your cat!**

Many health issues are caused by improper diet. When a cat has diarrhea, is over-grooming, is vomiting, has bald spots from pulling hair out or any number of other symptoms that do not have a good medical explanation, the first question is, "What do you feed your cat?" Medical conditions, such as Irritable Bowel Disease/Syndrome, diabetes, urinary tract infections, Chronic Renal Failure, or blockages can greatly benefit from an improved or more appropriate diet. So, read the labels, and then buy your meat for you cat. "It's what's for dinner!"