

Variety and Rotation

By Shane Somerville, All The Best Pet Care

Rotating the foods that your pets eat is one of the best things that you can do for their health and well being. Contrary to popularly held beliefs, keeping your pet on one food for his or her lifetime can cause more harm than good. Here are some of the “hows and whys” of offering your pet a variety of healthful mealtime options.

Why Switch?

Just like people, cats and dogs get bored with the same food day in and day out. Imagine if you had to eat the same kind of cereal for months, or even years- you'd get bored, too! Another important reason to switch foods is that it helps prevent allergies from developing. Cats and dogs that eat the same food for an extended period of time often develop allergies to one or more of the ingredients in their food. Varying their diet prevents the body from being overexposed to potential allergens. Pets also develop a stronger, tougher stomach and digestive system by being exposed to many different kinds of foods- a great way of eliminating stomach upsets. Finally, by varying the protein sources and brands that you feed, you are providing your pet with a wider spectrum of vital nutrients like trace minerals and vitamins that keep your pets their healthiest!

Kinds of Foods

There are four basic types of food that that you can offer your cat or dog:

- Dry: Cost effective, convenient to feed, easy to store
- Canned: Nutrient dense, palatable, high in moisture, helps overweight pets shed excess weight
- Frozen Raw: Closest to the ancestral diet, healthiest option, cleans teeth, offers natural enzymes
- Freeze-Dried: Lightweight and great for travel, works great as a treat, less mess than raw

How to Switch?

Don't be intimidated- switching your pet's food can be an easy and positive experience. Puppies and kittens are the easiest to transition, as their digestive systems are more adaptable. To start your puppy or kitten off right, introduce lots of different kinds, flavors and textures of food at an early age. Older pets, especially those who have been on the same food for an extended period of time, may need a little more time to adjust to their new food. Make a gradual switch to a new food by starting with 10-20% new food and increasing the amount over the course of four to seven days. Digestive aids such as our own Good Digestion or probiotics like acidophilus can help aid in the digestion of new foods as well. After a few months of switching gradually, your pet's digestive system will toughen up and you will be able to decrease or even eliminate the transition period altogether.

While dogs often transition easily from dry food to canned or raw foods, it can be trickier for cats to switch if they are used to a dry only diet. (For more information on why wet food is so critical for cats, please see our “What's in Your Pet's Bowl?” and “Urinary Problems in Cats” handouts.) Some tips for making a smooth transition:

- Try many different flavors and textures of canned food
- Offer twice daily feeding and remove dry food when the wet is offered
- Try dipping kibbles into the canned food to get your cat used to the taste and smell of canned
- Put some delicious toppings on the canned food like Bonito flakes, salmon oil or chicken bits
- Be patient! It takes some cats weeks or even months, but they will come around eventually

To introduce raw to your cat, try mixing it into a favorite canned food, or ask one of our nutrition experts to recommend an extra palatable raw food. The crunchiness of freeze-dried food can be a great way to get fussy cats used to raw as well. You can also add some warm (not hot) water to bring the raw to room temperature. Dogs usually take to raw food very quickly- just be sure to phase it in gradually since it is so much more nutrient dense than cooked foods.

By introducing your pet to the various kinds of foods available, you are helping to make sure that he or she is getting the most nutritious and well-rounded diet possible for a longer, happier life!

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