



## Westgate Pet Clinic

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## Nutrition – Feeding Guidelines for Cats

Feeding your cat the appropriate amount of a well-balanced diet is vital to the maintenance of overall health and well-being. In order to understand how and what to feed cats, it is necessary to understand how the nutritional requirements of the cat have developed through the process of biological evolution.

### Do cats have any special dietary needs?

From a biological evolution perspective, there are two important factors that influence a cat's diet. These factors are:

- 1) Cats are **obligate carnivores**
- 2) Cats are of **desert origin**

### "Cats cannot be vegetarians!"

An **obligate** or **true carnivore** is an animal that requires meat in its diet. They may eat other foods offered to them, especially animal products like cheese and bone marrow or sweet sugary substances such as honey and syrup. These foods are not essential and are not consumed on a regular basis. True carnivores lack the metabolism required for the proper digestion of vegetable matter. Some carnivorous mammals eat vegetation specifically as an *emetic* or substance that causes vomiting. While some cat owners may find the fact that the domestic cat is an obligate carnivore disturbing or objectionable, it is important to bear in mind the practical consequences – cats cannot be vegetarians!

Through evolution, cats have become dependent on the specific forms of nutrients found only in animal tissue. Examples include certain essential fatty acids, minerals and vitamins (especially calcium, Vitamin A and niacin). These nutrients are not found in plant tissue in forms that can be used by cats. Equally important, as obligate carnivores, cats require high levels of dietary protein with the appropriate balance of amino acids (the building blocks from which proteins are made).

Most mammals, including humans and cats, use the protein in food to build and maintain tissue and carry out biological reactions. However, unlike other mammals, cats have evolved in such a way as to be "obliged" to use protein as their primary source of daily calories! By comparison, humans and dogs have evolved to use carbohydrates as primary energy sources.



The high levels of the correct types of protein that cats need can only be found in animal tissue. In fact, diets based solely on plant protein are not digested as efficiently, and could be harmful or even fatal if fed as the only source of protein because they contain inappropriate levels of certain critical amino acids. These critical amino acids are called essential amino acids because they must be supplied in the diet; cats require a greater number of these essential amino acids than either humans or dogs. Quality canned cat foods have more protein than dry foods and should always be offered as a significant part of your cat/s daily nutritional needs. Dry foods need to be higher in carbohydrates (sugar) to be manufactured into kibble form.

### "Their desert origin allows them to conserve water more efficiently."

The second evolutionary fact unique to the domestic cat is that its ancestors were of **desert origin**. Because of this origin, many aspects of a cat's needs are different from other mammals. On a practical basis, because their desert origin allows them to conserve water more efficiently, cats can drink less water per day than a dog of similar size. Fresh drinking water should still always be provided for domestic cats. However, do not be alarmed if your cat seems to drink very little water. Some cats fed moist or canned foods get most of their water directly from the food and their owners rarely see the cat drink!

### What is the natural feeding behavior of cats?

On their own, most domestic cats are "nibblers" and will eat small meals frequently throughout the day and night. In fact, depending on the

individual and the type of food, some cats will eat from 12 – 20 meals a day! This is especially true for cats eating dry foods, whereas moist or canned foods are usually consumed quickly in one to three larger meals per day.

### "Cats appear to prefer food with a strong odor."

As anyone that has ever owned a cat can attest, cats can be "finicky," This simply reflects the fact that the texture, odor, temperature, and flavor of food are strong influences on a cat's food preferences. Cats often develop preferences for specific textures and/or shapes of food, and some cats will choose the familiar over the novel shape. Cats appear to prefer food with a strong odor. Food temperature influences its odor, and since warm food has more aroma or smell, cats eat it more readily. This is a helpful tactic to use when cats are sick; in many cases, they can be encouraged to eat simply by warming up their food.

### What is the most practical way to feed a cat?

With the unique nutritional requirements and feeding behavior of the domestic cat in mind, it is easy to appreciate practical recommendations for feeding. In all cases, your cat should have access to fresh, clean drinking water.

#### Feeding kittens

Young kittens need to eat frequently. Although they need relatively large quantities of food because they are growing rapidly, they have limited space in their tiny stomachs.

At **eight weeks of age, they should have unlimited food offered.** They can be fed about **5 meals a day by 4 months of age.**

By **6 months**, the need for food is decreased as kittens are about 75% of their adult size and can be fed **2 meals a day.**

A good quality kitten food has advantages over adult cat food since it has been specially formulated for a kitten's demanding nutritional requirements. Because of their rapid growth, any nutritional "mistakes" made during kittenhood will have severe, even irreversible, consequences. For most kittens, growth is almost complete by six months of age. They can be changed to "adult" cat food at 6–8 months of age.



### "Kittens and adult cats do not need milk."

Contrary to popular myth, kittens and adult cats do not need milk. In fact, by about 12 weeks of age most kittens lose the ability to digest milk sugar (lactose). Therefore, while small amounts may be tolerated, too much milk can lead to intestinal upset and diarrhea because cats cannot digest it properly!

#### Feeding the adult cat

A high-quality commercial adult cat food should always be fed because these diets have been specially formulated to contain all the nutrients that a cat requires. Dry or wet food can be used but care should be taken to feed the correct amount, especially when feeding canned diets since it is easy to overfeed a cat. Once a cat becomes overweight or obese, it is much harder to lose the excess weight than it is to prevent them becoming overweight in the first place. **Many owners prefer to feed meals of moist food twice a day and provide small amounts of dry food in between meals.** This is fine as long as you ensure that your cat is receiving the proper number of calories and getting enough physical activity.

It is important to remember that when it comes to diet and feeding behaviors, each cat is an individual with unique needs and characteristics. The number of meals offered and the amount and type of food used will vary with individual preferences and activity levels. For example, outdoor cats may need more calories than less active indoor cats. In addition, nutritional requirements and dietary preferences change over the course of a cat's lifetime. Kittens, adults and senior cats all have different nutritional needs. Your cat should be fed a diet specially formulated for these life stages. Cats with certain illnesses will benefit from a special therapeutic or "prescription" diet that may control symptoms and delay progression of disease.

Choosing a high quality food from the hundreds of available brands can be challenging. The pet nutrition industry is very competitive and relies on persuasive advertising to sell their products. Not all pet foods are created equally, although many commercially available foods are good balanced diets. However, the quality of ingredients can vary, and it can be difficult to determine their quality based strictly on reading the label. Our staff at the veterinary clinic can help you interpret the information, based on scientific principles, and can help you choose a diet that meets your cat's specific needs. When you have questions about a particular food or food ingredient, your best source of help is your professional veterinary health care providers.

Below is a list of some non-prescription high-protein canned cat foods.

## Feline Canned 95–100% Meat High Protein Diets

**Wellness:** <http://www.wellnesspetfood.com/cat-wellness.aspx>

The **Wellness Core** product line includes dry and canned food, is grain-free and marketed as high protein. Wellness Core canned is available in two varieties: Chicken, Turkey and Chicken Liver and Salmon, Whitefish, and Herring, and is a complete and balanced diet (for all life stages). Note: The regular Wellness canned food is not high protein.

**Innova Evo:** <http://www.evopet.com/products/>

Innova EVO is clearly labeled 95% protein on the can. In June of 2010, Natura Pet Products was acquired by The Procter and Gamble Company, who says they are committed to protecting quality and using the same high quality ingredients. Innova EVO (Chicken/Turkey or Beef) is lower priced than all or most of others on list. Innova EVO Turkey and Chicken is complete and balanced for cats at all life stages. Innova EVO 95% Beef, 95% Chicken and Turkey, 95% Duck, and 95% Venison are all complete and balanced for adult cat maintenance. Innova EVO Turkey and Chicken also has herring in it, and all varieties have herring oil.

**Nature's Variety Instinct:** <http://www.naturesvariety.com/Instinct/cat/can/all>

Nature's Variety Instinct is clearly labeled 95% meat, 5% fruit/veg, 0% grain and is available in Chicken, Beef, Lamb, Rabbit, Duck, and Venison. All are complete and balanced for cats at all life stages. Note that the names sound like they are single-source protein, but they all include an additional protein source to the one on the label.

**Wysong** <http://www.wysong.net/canned-wet-cat-food.php>

Wysong has several product lines for canned cat food, some containing corn and soy, some vegetarian. The vegetarian diet is not complete and balanced (needs to be supplemented with meat). Other canned food diets (Vitality, Anergen, GeriatrX, Gourmet, Stew and Gravy) are available but again appear to have only adequate protein levels. Gourmet (designed for both cats and dogs) and Stew and Gravy (not a maintenance diet, just for intermittent feeding, so not complete and balanced) are not recommended. Only the Au Jus product is 95-100% meat. Note that the names sound like they are single-source protein, but they all include an additional protein source to the one on the label.

**Merrick Before Grain** <http://www.beforegrain.com/>

Merrick Before Grain canned diets are 96% Meat, and come in varieties including Beef, Chicken, Quail, Salmon, Tuna, and Turkey. Buffalo does not appear to be available any longer. These foods are complete and balanced for all life stages. All varieties include egg in their ingredients, Quail also contains chicken, fish varieties also include whitefish.

## Tips for Transitioning Feline Dry Food Addicts to Canned Food

**Lisa A. Pierson, DVM**

The information contained in this handout is an excerpt from Feeding Your Cat: Know the Basics of Feline Nutrition which can be found at [catinfo.org](http://catinfo.org).

The first paragraphs of that article are as follows:

Diet is the brick and mortar of health. This paper lays out some often-ignored principles of feline nutrition and explains why cats have a better chance at optimal health if they are fed a quality canned food diet instead of dry kibble. Putting a little thought into what you feed your cat(s) can pay big dividends over their lifetime and very possibly help them avoid serious, painful and costly illnesses. An increasing number of American Veterinary Medical Association members, including board-certified veterinary practitioners, are now strongly recommending the feeding of canned food instead of dry kibble.

The three key negative issues associated with dry food are:

- 1) type of protein – too high in plant-based versus animal-based proteins
- 2) carbohydrate load is too high
- 3) water content is too low

Keep in mind that the best time to implement a diet change is when the cat is healthy. Trying to get an ill cat to embrace a new type of food can be problematic and a cat that is not feeling well may even develop a food aversion if they associate the new food with their discomfort. Sick cats are often not consuming enough calories as it is so if your cat has a decreased appetite due to illness, this is not the time to push a diet change with too much intensity.

For patients with urinary tract problems, it is extremely important for them to increase their water intake. However, because cystitis (inflammation of the bladder wall) is thought to be linked to stress – and implementing a diet change can be stressful – we need to be mindful of this and go slowly. While you are working on getting your cat to eat canned food, you can increase their water intake by using flavored waters such as tuna water, beef or chicken broth, clam juice, lactose-free cat milk, etc. You can make your own tuna water by adding 3 cups of water to a can of tuna. Mash it up and let it sit for ~15 minutes then pour the water into covered (to help maintain

freshness) ice cube trays. 3 cups of water will fill two 16- cube trays. The ice cube trays can be used for other flavored liquids as well. Prior to using, heat the ice cubes to 'mouse body' temperature and then add 1-2 TBS per meal of canned food in addition to putting some in a bowl as a separate drink of water.

There are few things in life more frustrating than dealing with a finicky cat. The members of this species can be incredibly 'set in their ways' when it comes to their dietary preferences. Cats, like children, often resist what is best for them. The two most frequent comments that heard from people when trying to convince them to feed their cats a healthier diet are "my cat won't eat canned food" and "but my cat really likes his dry food." Children really like potato chips and ice cream but that certainly does not mean those food items constitute optimal nutrition.

The transition process often involves much more than just plunking down a new food item. Time, patience, and tricks are often required. One reason that cats like dry food so much is because the pet food companies do not play fair when manufacturing this sub-optimal food source. They coat the kibble with extremely enticing animal digest sprays which are very pleasing to a cat – making a poor quality diet very desirable to the target animal. In addition to the aforementioned coating of dry food with animal digests, another issue is one of a crunchy texture which is very different from canned food. Cats are very resistant to such a drastic change in the texture of their food.

If you are convinced that getting your cat off of dry food is the way to go, read on for some tips on how to accomplish this. The key is to do it slowly and with patience and incorporate various tricks for the stubborn cats. The most important issue is actually making the change, not how fast you accomplish it. I must say that my cats tested every ounce of patience I had over a 3 + month period of time during their transition from dry to canned food. They had been on dry food their entire lives and did not recognize canned food as food. My cats ranged in age from 2 years to 10 years at the time of the transition.

The single biggest mistake I see people make time and again is to say that their cat "won't touch" the new food and then panic and fill up the bowl with dry food. In many cases, it is simply not that easy to get cats off of dry food. (See Molly's story at [catinfo.org](http://catinfo.org) – Feline Obesity page – for a look at one very stubborn cat.)

There are two categories of cats – those that will eat canned food and those that will be extremely resistant to eating anything other than dry food. If your cat falls into the first category, lucky you. These cats will take to it with the attitude of "finally – an appropriate diet for my species." In this case, if your cat has been on all dry food, or only receives canned food as an occasional 'treat', start by feeding canned food in increasing amounts. Gradually decrease the dry, taking about a week to fully switch the cat over to 100 percent canned food. Some cats may experience softer stools during the transition. I do not worry if this happens and tend to 'ride it out'. If diarrhea results from the diet change you will either need to experiment with different canned foods or slow the transition down and do it over a period of several weeks.

The average cat should eat 4-6 ounces of canned food per day split between 2-3 meals but this is just a general guideline. When determining how much you should be feeding your cat once transitioned to canned food, keep it simple. Too fat? Feed less. Too thin? Feed more.

### **Now....for the stubborn cats.....**

If you are unlucky like I was, and your cat does not recognize the fact that he is a carnivore and would live a healthier life if eating canned food, (or a home-prepared diet) then you will have some work to do. Some cats that have been on dry food for their entire life will be quite resistant to the diet change and may take several weeks or longer to make the transition to a healthier diet.

For 'resistant-to-change' cats, you will need to use the normal sensation of hunger to help with the transition. For this reason, it is very important to stop free-feeding dry food. This is the first, and very critical, step. You need to establish set mealtimes. They are not going to try anything new if their bowl of dry food is in front of them 24/7. Cats do not need food available at all times. It really is okay for them to experience a hunger pain! That said, it was very hard for me to listen to my cats begging for food even though I was strong in my conviction that I was heading them in the best direction for optimal health. It truly was a stressful time for me and them.

Actually, I think it was harder on me! This is where many people fail and just give in and fill up the dry food bowl. There were a few times when I had to call my 'sponsor' and was instructed to "just leave the house if you can't take looking into those eyes!" I left the house. Those pitiful little cries of "I have not had food for two WHOLE hours!" were hard to take. But, lo and behold, they were just fine when I returned. Not one cat had died from hunger.

**On the other hand, do not attempt to withhold food for long periods of time (greater than 24 hours) with the hope that your cat will choose the new food.** You need to 'convince' them that a high quality canned food really is good for them, rather than to try starving them into it – which does not work anyway. Allowing a cat to go without food – especially an overweight cat – for a long period of time (greater than 48 hours) can be quite dangerous and may result in hepatic lipidosis (fatty liver disease).

Hepatic lipidosis can also develop when a cat consumes 50% or less of his daily caloric requirements over a period of many days. The definition of "many" varies from cat-to-cat. For this reason it is important to understand that you need to have some idea of the calories from canned food combined with the calories from dry food that your cat is consuming on a daily basis while you are implementing the transition to canned food. I have never seen a cat develop hepatic lipidosis when consuming at least 15 calories per pound per day. This number is figured on lean body weight, not fat weight. If your cat weighs 18 pounds but really should weigh 12 pounds, please make sure that he is consuming at least ~180 calories per day. (12 pounds lean body mass X 15 calories/pound/day = ~180 calories/day) If you have a small female cat that should only weigh 9 pounds, please make sure that she is consuming at least 135 calories per day.

Canned foods never list the calorie content on the can but many dry foods do list this information on the bag. A rough guideline for the calorie content of most canned foods that are 78% moisture is ~30 calories/ounce but can range from 20 to 40 calories/ounce as shown by the chart located at [binkyspage.tripod.com/canfood.html](http://binkyspage.tripod.com/canfood.html).

Most cats will lose some weight during the transition to canned food. Given that a very high percentage of cats are overweight to begin with, this is a favorable result of the diet change – as long as they do not lose too much weight too fast! A cat should never lose more than 1–2% of his body weight per week – preferably closer to 1%. I highly suggest that all cat caregivers weigh their cats periodically. This will help ensure a safe transition to a healthier diet and, in general, weight loss is often the first sign of ill health for any reason. I make it a point to weigh my cats at least twice yearly. The Health-O-Meter HDC100-01 baby scale weighs to the nearest 1/2 ounce and has a 'hold' button on it that helps obtain an accurate weight even for a cat that is moving around a bit. All of my cats lost weight during the three months that it took to switch them to canned but none of them became too thin. They slimmed down to a nice lean body weight – losing fat while maintaining their muscle mass. They also became much more active.

If your cat is overweight, please see the Feline Obesity page at [catinfo.org](http://catinfo.org). Resign yourself to the fact that you will be very frustrated at times and you will be wasting canned food as they turn up their nose at it. Also, you may want to immediately switch your cat to a dry food that has fewer calories from carbohydrates than most dry foods. There are three grain-free/low carbohydrate dry foods currently on the market: Natura/Innova's EVO, Wellness CORE, and Nature's Variety Instinct. These low-carb dry foods are very high in fat and therefore are very calorie dense. These foods must be portion-controlled otherwise your cat may end up gaining weight. Note that dry Innova EVO has 612 calories per cup according to the information on the bag. One quarter of a cup contains 153 calories so be very careful to pay attention to how much of these high calorie dry foods you feed.

The caloric needs of an average cat can range between 150 – 250 calories/day depending on their lean body weight and activity level. **The low-carb dry foods are also very high in phosphorus. This is especially detrimental for cats with compromised kidney function.** And, of course, these low-carb dry foods are water-depleted just like all dry foods are and are cooked at very high temperatures in order to dry them out. I do not recommend these dry foods for long-term feeding for all of the reasons stated above. Please use them only as transition diets. Be sure to stay away from any "light" varieties since those types of foods are very high in carbohydrates.

### Here are some various tricks for the stubborn ones.

Keep in mind that different tricks work on different cats:

- If your cat has been eating dry food on a free-choice basis, take up the food and establish a schedule of two – three times per day feedings. I really do prefer just twice-daily feedings when trying to transition them. A normal, healthy hunger response after 12 hours goes a long way to convince them to try something new. Once the cat has transitioned to canned food, I prefer to either free-feed them (if they are not too fat) or to put out a meal three times per day. Small cats in the wild eat 8–10 small meals per day. I do not worry about leaving canned food out for up to 12 hours at a time. Keep in mind that a lion is not going to eat his entire prey immediately. If you want to take the transition very slowly, you can feed the amount that your cat normally consumes in a 24 hour period – split up into two feedings to get him used to meal feeding. Many people, however, are unsure as to how much their free-fed cat really eats so I would start off by figuring out the calories that your cat needs to maintain his weight if he does not need to lose any weight. Again, most cats only need 150–250 calories/day. The dry food bag should tell you how many calories are in a cup of food but if it does not, you can check to see if it is listed on the dry food chart at [binkyspage.tripod.com/dryfood.html](http://binkyspage.tripod.com/dryfood.html) Leave the food down for 20 minutes, and then remove any uneaten portion. Repeat in 8–12 hours depending on if you are feeding 2 or 3 times per day. During the first few days of transitioning to a set schedule, you can offer canned food during the dry food meals, or in-between meals. The stubborn ones, however, will not touch it. Do not despair – all cats will eventually eat canned food if their caregiver is determined, methodical, and patient enough. Once your cat is on a schedule you will notice that he is more enthusiastic about food during his proper mealtimes and will be much more inclined to try something new.

- Once you have established scheduled mealtimes, you will most likely need to start feeding a bit less at each mealtime in order to get the normal sensation of hunger to work in your favor. Again, we are trying to use the normal sensation of hunger to help us out. We are not trying to starve the cat into the diet change.
- Once your cat is on a schedule of meal-feeding instead of free-feeding, try feeding a meal of canned food only. If he will not eat it – and the very stubborn ones won't – try not to get frustrated – and do not put down dry food. Try some of the other tips listed below. If he still will not eat the canned food, let him get a bit hungrier. Offer the canned again in a couple of hours. Try a different brand/flavor or a different 'trick'. Once it has been ~18 hours since he has eaten anything, give him just a small amount (~1/4 of a cup – or less if it is EVO) of his dry food – keeping track of his daily calorie intake.
- Remember to be patient.
- Exercising your cat with a tassel toy before feeding can also help stimulate his appetite.
- Instead of putting the dry food portion in his bowl, turn it into a game. Throw the dry food, one or two pieces at a time across the room so that he has to run back and forth and 'hunt' for it. This trick worked great for my obesity project, Bennie. Bennie went from 30 lbs to 18 lbs once on portion-controlled canned food. I used 25 pieces/day of EVO for him to run after which was about 25 calories. EVO is very calorie dense so 25 pieces of most dry foods will not contain this many calories. Playing the 'toss the dry food portion' game will help your cat burn off calories and should stimulate his appetite so that he may be more inclined to try canned food. It is also a great way to interact with your cat which helps to relieve the stress/boredom that many indoor cats experience.
- Cats' noses are much more sensitive than ours are. They can smell the dry food in the cupboards. I suggest either putting it in the refrigerator or putting it in a tightly sealed container. If they can smell it, they will hold out for it. Some people recommend getting it out of your house completely, but this is not possible when you are dealing with a very stubborn cat that needs a bit of time and patience to make the transition happen.
- The following worked for my cats: Sprinkle a very small amount of tuna – or any other favorite treat (some cats do not like fish and would prefer cooked chicken) – on the top of the canned food and then once they are eating this, start pressing it into the top of the new food. (The "light" tuna is better than the fancy white tuna because it has a stronger smell. Or, Trader Joe's makes a Cat Tuna that is very stinky.) Be careful to decrease the amount of fish as soon as possible. Health problems can occur with a predominantly fish-based diet. Plus, you do not want to create a situation where your cat will only eat very fishy foods.
- Make sure that any refrigerated canned food is warmed up a bit. Cats prefer their food at 'mouse body temperature'.
- Try offering some cooked (or raw – whole meats, rinsed well or parboiled) chicken or meat baby food. One of the goals is to get your cat used to eating food that does not crunch. He needs to get used to a different texture. Also, chicken is a great source of protein to point him in the proper direction toward a high protein, low carbohydrate diet. If he eats the chicken, he may head right into eating canned food. Then again....he may not.
- Try sprinkling some parmesan cheese on the canned food. Most cats love parmesan cheese and this trick has been very successful for me.
- Try a product called FortiFlora. This product can be obtained from your veterinarian. Most cats love FortiFlora and this has recently become my favorite trick. This is a probiotic made by Purina but you are not going to use it for its probiotic properties. You are just going to use it as a flavor enhancer. The base ingredient in FortiFlora is animal digest – the very substance that makes dry food so very enticing to cats. The directions say to use 1 package/day – and you can use this much if you want to – but this amount is not usually necessary. You may only need ~1/4 of a package – or less – with part mixed into the food and part sprinkled on top of the food just as you would use salt and pepper on your own food.
- There are numerous freeze dried meat treats on the market that you can also sprinkle on top of the canned food. Halo's Liv A Littles is a popular choice.
- Speaking of texture, a common question is "can I just soak the dry food in water?" I hedge more than just a bit at this question. Dry food

often has a high bacterial content. Mold is also often found in dry food. There have been many deaths of dogs and cats secondary to eating mold mycotoxins, vomitoxins and aflatoxins which often contaminate the grains found in dry food. If you want to try the trick of wetting down the dry food to alter the texture, please leave it out for only 20–30 minutes then discard it. Bacteria and mold thrive in moisture.

- Try dipping some dry food pieces in the juice from the canned food. Some cats may refuse to eat it if the dry food even touches the canned food. But if he will eat it with a bit of canned juice on it, try the 'chip and dip' trick. Scoop up a tiny bit of canned food onto the piece of dry food. Put them on a separate plate from his small portion of dry food. Some cats will eat their small portion of dry and then go investigate the dry food with a tiny bit of canned on it.

- Going one step further, try adding a few small pieces of the canned food to the small portion of dry food. Your cat may pick around the canned food but will get used to the smell – and texture – even if he does not eat any pieces of the new food.

- Crush some dry food and sprinkle it on the top of the canned food.

- If you do not think it will upset your cat, try gently rubbing a bit of canned food or juice on the cat's gums. This may get him interested in the taste and texture of the new food – but do it gently. You do not want to make this a stressful situation and create a food aversion. (This trick is commonly used to get justweaned kittens used to eating canned food.)

- If you do not think it will upset your cat, use your finger to put a tiny bit of canned food or juice on his paw for him to lick off. This has not worked for me in the two cats I have tried it on but it is another idea. Make sure you do it without stressing your cat. Again, you do not want to create a food aversion.

- If you have a multiple cat household, some cats like to eat alone in a less stressful environment, so you may need to take these cats into a separate, quiet room to think about the error of their ways – their carbohydrate/dry food addiction. Once in a quiet setting, away from the other cats, two of my cats would eat canned food/tuna 'meatballs' by hand. Not from a bowl, mind you, but only from my hand. I'm not sure who was being trained. They did eventually start eating from a bowl after a few hand feedings.

- Try various brands and flavors of canned foods. Try Friskies, 9–Lives, Fancy Feast, etc. Many cats love the foods that are all by-products and turn up their noses at the 'higher end' foods like Wellness, etc. You can worry about feeding a higher quality canned food later and you can always mix different types of food together. The initial goal is just to get your cat used to eating canned food and not dry kibble. And remember what I said above. I would much rather see cats eating Friskies or 9–Lives canned food than any dry food.

- Syringe–feeding is also another option but has to be done with finesse and patience so as to avoid a food aversion. If you choose to syringe–feed, your goal is not to feed him a full meal. Sometimes just syringing a 1–2 cc's can 'jump–start' your cat's into eating the canned food – maybe not the first time but it will at least get him to taste the new food and experience a foreign texture. The best way to syringe–feed is to kneel on the floor with your cat between your legs so he is facing the same way as you are. Then, using a small (1cc/TB) syringe, slip it in the side of his mouth and give about 1/2 cc at a time. He may spit it out but you are just trying to get him used to the taste and texture, not stress him. Few canned foods will make it through the tip of a syringe but human meat baby food works well for this trick. You can also water it down a bit if you need to. If you want to use canned cat food instead of baby food, you will need to cut the end off of the syringe so that the opening is as big as the barrel. Make sure that the tip is smooth. If you do not want to cut the tip of the syringe off, you will need to puree a pate (versus chunks) type of food. I puree Wellness for this. I run it through the blender with a small amount of water (~3–4 tablespoons/5.5 ounce can). Then I strain it to remove anything big enough to clog the small tip of the syringe. Wellness is also a balanced diet – unlike human baby food. Even though human baby food is not a balanced diet for long–term use, it is a great tool that can be used to help transition a cat to a texture that he is not used to.

- I did have to take drastic measures for a foster cat named Molly. She was dangerously obese (20 lbs – double what she should have weighed) and would not eat canned food even after two weeks of syringefeeding her. She needed to go in for a dental so while she was under general anesthesia, I put in a feeding tube that went directly to her stomach. This took the stress off of both of us. After two weeks of feeding her via the tube she started licking the canned food from my fingers then suddenly decided it was time to eat it. That was a few years ago and she is now a playful, animated cat. Before the weight loss of 7 lbs, she could barely walk, could not clean herself, and was quite possibly headed for diabetes.

- Don't give up. One of my barn cats ate dry food for the first 12 years of her life. She would never touch the canned food that the other cats ate. Then, one day, she found her 'inner carnivore' and started eating canned food out of the blue! I was shocked. That was 4 years ago

and she has been on a 100% canned food diet since she made the switch. These are just a few tricks that you can try. Different tricks work on different cats. The key is to be patient. Remember, it took me three months to get my cats on 100% canned food. Most cats, however, will not take this long.

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