

Dietary Management of Cats

After Treatment with Radioiodine for Hyperthyroidism

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Hyperthyroid cats develop a number of metabolic problems that should to be addressed with nutritional modification. These include muscle wasting, insulin resistance (which predisposes to diabetes), and secondary hyperparathyroidism (which predisposes to kidney disease).

The recommendations listed below apply to cats both before and after treatment of your cat's hyperthyroid condition.

Feed higher protein, lower carbohydrate diets:

I recommend feeding a diet relatively low in carbs (<20% of calories) and relatively high in protein (>35% of calories) to best manage the treated hyperthyroid state and to prevent the further loss of lean muscle mass. Cats are true obligate carnivores — in the wild, they normally ingest less than 2% of their daily calories as carbohydrates and eat over 50% of their calories as protein.

The higher protein intake will help your cat restore any lost muscle mass, which develops in virtually all hyperthyroid cats. The lower carbohydrate levels will help control the pre-diabetic state, which is also common in these cats.

You can see a list of OTC canned foods with the protein and carbohydrate content at the website www.catinfo.org (www.catinfo.org/docs/FoodChartPublic9-22-12.pdf). To get to this link, go to the home page and look at the sidebar on the right — click on the link for “Protein/Fat/Carbs Chart” on the heading of *Feline Nutrition*.

Restrict phosphate intake:

Mild to moderate phosphate restriction is important for cats with a history of hyperthyroidism. Many of these cats will have very mild (subclinical) kidney problems, which can be controlled by the feeding a low phosphate diet.

To reach that goal, we can either formulate a lower-phosphate diet or select an OTC cat food relatively low in phosphorus.

In cats with mild or early kidney disease, use of an OTC diet with lower phosphate levels may be used. If an OTC diet is selected, look for one that contains < 250 mg of phosphate per 100 kcal. You may have to call a company for specific information. Fish-based cat foods are often high in phosphorus, so I stay away from these diets for cats with CKD.

You can download a list of OTC canned foods with the phosphate content at the catinfo.org website (www.catinfo.org/docs/FoodChartPhosphorus9-22-12.pdf). To get to this link, go to the home page and look at the sidebar on the right — click on the link for “Phosphorous in Cats Food-Chart” on the heading of *Feline Nutrition*.

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Encourage water intake:

Water is an extremely important nutrient that contributes to overall health in every living creature. Cats inherently have a low thirst drive and, in the wild, normally consume most of their daily water from their food. A cat's normal prey (e.g., mice and other rodents, birds) contains ~70% water — this percentage compared nicely with the water content of canned foods, which contain 70-80% water, but not at all with the very low 7-10% found in dry cat food.

Once we realize cats do not have a very strong thirst drive, it's easy to understand why it is critical for older cats to ingest a water-rich diet. The cat's lack of a strong thirst drive can lead to low-level, chronic dehydration when dry food makes up the bulk of their diet.

I know what you're thinking: "But my cat drinks a lot of water so dry food is just fine for him!" Of course, a cat consuming a predominantly dry food diet does drink more water than a cat consuming a canned food diet. But in the end, when water from all sources is added together (what's in their diet plus what they drink), the cat on canned food consumes approximately twice the amount of water compared with a cat eating canned food.