

THIS JUST IN

Conditional Approval for Important New Drug

Varenzin-CA1 helps control potentially fatal anemia in cats with CKD

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) conditionally approved Varenzin-CA1 (molidustat oral suspension) for the control of nonregenerative anemia associated with chronic kidney disease (CKD) in cats. Nonregenerative anemia can be fatal because the cat's bone marrow can't produce enough red blood cells to replace the dead ones removed from the blood. This inhibits oxygen from being carried from the lungs throughout the body.

Current treatments include blood transfusion, supplemental iron therapy, and erythropoietin replacement (erythropoietin is a hormone that stimulates red blood cell production), although there are no erythropoietin treatments approved for cats. Varenzin-CA1 helps to increase production of erythropoietin in the kidney, which in turn stimulates the bone marrow to produce more red blood cells.

Conditional approval is often given to drugs that increase options for treating animals with uncommon, serious, or life-threatening diseases without existing adequate therapies. ■

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Preventing Finicky Felines

Establish good food habits when they're kittens

Got a picky cat? If you do, you're not alone. We know of one cat who refuses to eat her food if the kibbles are a different shape—circles are good, stars are bad. It's not fun. But there are things you can do to encourage your kitten to be a curious eater.

Offer Many Textures and Flavors

Even if you have a particular cat food that you like to feed, offer kittens a variety of things to taste and try.

Feeding one food all the time may program your cat into thinking that it is the only diet choice. This can become problematic if that diet is discontinued, your store runs out, or your cat develops a problem that requires a diet change.

Variety packs of canned food are an easy way to expose your kitten to different flavors. Rotate flavors at each meal so your kitten is experiencing different tastes, and try out both paté and shredded or chunky formulas.

Note Preferences

That said, favorite foods are a great thing to have in your arsenal for times of stress, such as when traveling, or if your cat is sick and has a poor appetite.

Flavor is the obvious factor for kitty preferences, but texture matters, too. Some cats love the crunch of a big dental kibble, while others prefer soft canned food. Even with canned food, some prefer paté, while others opt for a nice shredded formula doused in gravy.

You want your cat's daily meals to be something that he enjoys and eats willingly, but it can be beneficial to have something extra special stored away just in case you need it.

Mom's Influence

Kittens learn a lot from their mothers. If your queen is a picky eater, it may be helpful to remove her from the litter when offering different foods to the kittens. This will allow the kittens to explore on their own rather than just following what Mom says is good to eat.



Rotate foods, flavors, and textures so your kitten becomes used to changes.

Benefits of a Mixed Diet

There are pros to both canned and dry cat food diets.

Canned foods have a higher moisture content and are often more palatable because of their higher protein content. Dry foods, on the other hand, help support dental health and are more convenient for feeding on the road or putting in puzzle toys to encourage your cat to be active.

Many veterinarians recommend feeding your cats and kittens a mix of dry and canned foods to maximize the benefits of each. This approach is helpful if your cat later develops a health condition that requires a specific diet.

You have a couple options for a mixed diet. You can offer your kittens wet food at some meals and dry food at others or mix them together. Some cats may enjoy having both options at meals, but in separate bowls.

You can also use the dry food portion of your cat's daily ration for training or exercise. Kibble is perfect for loading into a puzzle toy to encourage active play and easy to toss to your cat as a reward. ■

Understanding a Cat's Taste Buds

There's a reason cats aren't the sugar addicts we tend to be

We all know our cats have definite preferences for their food choices, which may or may not include flavors. An article from Petfood Industry, however, offered some useful facts about a cat's taste buds:

A cat's taste buds are functional right at birth or possibly a bit earlier. Cats have about 1,000 taste buds, compared to 2,000 for dogs and 9,000 for people. Some of this difference is simply due to tongue size.

Cats don't have taste receptors for sweet and sugary. Some sugars stimulate bitter taste receptors in cats.

"Bitter" is no more pleasant to cats than it is to us. Manufacturers of antifreeze have taken advantage of the fact that cats have bitter taste buds and add denatonium, which is a very bitter substance, to antifreeze to discourage pets from eating it. Still, drips of antifreeze are dangerous to your pet. Most cats who have toxic encounters with antifreeze became ill from licking it off their paws or coat, not specifically choosing to lick it up from the floor.

Older and ill pets may lose some of their taste receptors. Since smell and taste are closely related, it helps to encourage eating in these pets by warming a meal to increase its aroma or adding "smelly" things to the meal, such as the juice from canned tuna.

Stress can also affect taste receptors even in young animals. This explains why an ill or upset cat may stop eating. Medications aimed at appetite stimulation act on the central nervous system not on local taste receptors. ■

Cats Can Have a Disagreement But Remain Pals

Playtime that dissolves into a "fight" might be communication

We've all seen it: Kitty playtime turns into a fight. Researchers in Slovakia theorized that it could be one cat telling the other she's finished playing for now or just increased rough-and-tumble play or an agonistic conflict, basically a disagreement. How do we know?

The researchers devised a study using 105 YouTube videos that showed face-to-face interactions between cats and assessed the cats for the frequency of the interaction and duration of six behavior elements:

- ▶ Inactive body posture
- ▶ Wrestling
- ▶ Chasing
- ▶ Other interactive activities
- ▶ Non-interactive activities
- ▶ Vocalization

The interactions were labeled by four cat behavior experts as "playful," "intermediate," or "agonistic."

The results showed reciprocal wrestling was most closely associated with a group of playfully interacting cats, while vocalization and chasing were associated with the agonistic group.

The intermediate group, while having characteristics of both, was more closely related to the playful group than the agonistic group, with prolonged exchanges of interactive behaviors being a predominant feature.

These results suggest that cats have an intermediate category between mutual social play and agonism. This level might escalate into a fully agonistic encounter and does not necessarily reflect a breakdown in their social relationship. It's more of a short-term disagreement in social priorities. ■

Gajdoš-Kmecová, N., et al. An ethological analysis of close-contact inter-cat interactions determining if cats are playing, fighting, or something in between. Sci Rep 13, 92 (2023).



Is the jumping kitty trying to make a point to her unsuspecting pal below?

Cornell CatWatch

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Diabetic Remission In Cats

The elimination of the signs of diabetes is possible

We used to believe diabetes mellitus was a lifelong disease. Now veterinarians are seeing signs of the disease disappear in some cats, sometimes evolving into remission.

“The percentage of cats entering diabetic remission is highly variable and is thought to depend on the underlying cause that precipitated diabetes mellitus, the ability to remove factors that contributed to insulin resistance, and the chronicity of hyperglycemia,” says Dr. Jennifer Prieto, assistant clinical professor of internal medicine at the College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University.

True remission is when your cat has had normal blood glucose levels without insulin or an oral medication for at least two weeks, although four weeks is preferred before calling it remission. Most cats who go into remission do so within a few months of starting treatment, although some can take up to a year or more. The use of long-acting insulin products such as glargine has been associated with a greater likelihood of remission.

“Sometimes cats have concurrent diseases, such as hypersomatotropism

(acromegaly), that cause insulin resistance and cannot be effectively treated due to limited availability of treatment options (cost, geographic location). Hyperglycemia can damage the cells in the pancreas that produce insulin and therefore diabetic cats can lose the ability to make enough insulin to effectively regulate their blood sugar,” says Dr. Prieto.

Achieving Remission

Cats who are diagnosed early in their disease and who get blood sugar levels controlled within six months tend to have a better prognosis for remission. That means careful monitoring at home with blood level checks via an ear vein or foot pad prick and strict scheduling for the cat’s meals.

Most diabetic cats do best on a primarily canned diet, and offering meals rather than free feeding is important. Low-carbohydrate, high-protein diets are easiest for regulating these cats. Cats showing diabetic neuropathy such as weakness in the rear end have a lower likelihood of going into remission.

Overweight cats should be put on a careful, gradual, weight-loss program and then maintain that new, ideal weight. Any medications that influence insulin usage, including corticosteroids such as prednisone, dexamethasone, and depo medrol, should be stopped, if possible.

Cats with other ongoing health problems are less likely to go into remission. The inability to maintain a lean body condition, the use of medications that promote insulin resistance, and ongoing concurrent diseases contribute to relapse from remission, says Dr. Prieto.

The American Association of Feline Practitioners warns that “even cats that are in remission may fail a glucose tolerance test: Once a diabetic, always a diabetic, always at risk for recurrent insulin dependence.”

Relapses Happen

Relapse is common, with 26 to 30% of cats becoming insulin-dependent again after remission. Some studies estimate median remission times of 120 to 150 days, although that’s highly variable and can range from several weeks to many

Temporary Diabetes

Cats on high levels of steroids or battling pancreatitis may develop temporary secondary diabetes. Weaning off the steroids and healing the pancreatitis may lead to long term remission of the diabetes, and in some cases, it may never recur.

New Diabetes Treatment

The FDA recently approved an oral drug called bexagliflozin (Bexacat) for the treatment of newly diagnosed feline diabetics that have not received insulin therapy. Talk to your veterinarian about this exciting new development.

years. You will need to be observant so that you can immediately notice if your cat goes out of remission. She will show the same signs as prior to her original diagnosis, which include weight loss, increased appetite, and increased water intake and urination.

Cats that enter remission may remain in a pre-diabetic state and have higher-than-normal blood glucose levels when at rest or challenged with a meal and have fewer pancreatic beta-cells to make insulin. Over time, they often exhaust these cells and lose the ability to regulate their blood glucose.

Bottom Line

The idea of remission brings hope, but it’s important to be realistic. If your diabetic cat goes into remission, she may experience episodes of hypoglycemia and show signs such as weakness if you continue to administer insulin. If this happens, you need to consult with your veterinarian immediately and schedule a visit to recheck her blood values to determine if she truly is in remission. ■

Diabetes Prevention

Most diabetic cats are overweight, neutered male senior cats. Keeping your cat at a good weight and active can help prevent diabetes: Play with your cat! Diet matters, too. Diets high in carbohydrates may be a risk factor. Try to avoid the use of steroids unless necessary. For instance, if your cat is allergic to flea bites, practice flea control as opposed to treating the itching with medications. For other problems, other immune-modulating drugs might be a safer alternative than corticosteroids.



Sofia Potarina | iStock



Jennifer Prieto, DVM, PhD, is an assistant clinical professor in the section of small animal medicine at Cornell University’s College of Veterinary Medicine.

Mammary Cancer in Cats

If your cat is diagnosed with mammary cancer, you will have some big decisions to make

Feline mammary cancer is a serious disease. It may not initially look bad to you because it starts as a tiny pea-sized lump near a nipple, and you may feel like it can just be removed and be done. Not so fast. That little lump has a high probability of being malignant, and may have already spread to surrounding breast tissue or even the lungs by the time it is found. Treatment needs to be swift and aggressive to prolong life.

“Simple lumpectomy is not recommended for mammary cancer in cats, as 85% to 90% of feline mammary tumors are malignant,” says Dr. Skylar Sylvester, assistant clinical professor, section of medical oncology at Cornell College of Veterinary Medicine. “Performing a mastectomy has been shown to improve the disease-free interval (how long cats live cancer free) compared to more conservative surgery.”

An article published in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* agrees, concluding that bilateral mastectomy for the treatment of mammary adenocarcinoma in cats improved the progression-free and disease-specific survival time (*J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2018; 252: 1393-1402). Adenocarcinoma is the most common breast tumor in cats.

What to Expect

If a tumor is found, the cancer will be staged, just like human cancer. “Preliminary staging for mammary

Early Spaying Can Be Preventative

If your female cat was spayed when she was young, she is most likely going to dodge this bullet.

“Mammary carcinoma can occur in both spayed and intact female cats, but it occurs in intact females at a much higher rate,” says Dr. Sylvester. “In fact, cats spayed before one year of age have nearly a 90% reduction in the risk of mammary carcinoma development in their lifetime compared with intact cats.”



If you find a lump or swelling in the mammary area, make a veterinary appointment immediately. Dr. Sylvester advises that the vast majority of tumors in this area are malignant.

carcinoma involves physical exam to measure the tumor and nearby lymph nodes, thoracic radiographs (chest x-rays) to look for evidence of cancer spread to the lungs, and abdominal ultrasound (sonogram) to evaluate for spread to the internal organs or inguinal (groin) or axillary (arm pit) lymph nodes that drain the mammary tissue,” says Dr. Sylvester. “If any lymph nodes are enlarged, then we recommend fine-needle aspirate and cytology to look for metastasis (cancer spread). Bloodwork is also performed at this time to assess overall systemic health for cancer treatment.”

Surgery is no small undertaking and not a decision to take lightly. Having some idea about what to expect will help you make informed decisions for your beloved feline. Consider these details:

- ▶ Bilateral mastectomy in cats can result in significant post-operative pain and discomfort. Fortunately, there have been huge advancements made in feline pain management.
- ▶ Some cats are not candidates to have both chains removed at once, depending on their weight and body conformation. These cats will need to have two staged procedures, with one

chain removed in an initial procedure, and the other removed in a second procedure weeks later.

- ▶ Potential post-op complications include infection, incisional failure (dehiscence), fluid accumulation (seroma), and abdominal wall hernia.

Prognosis

“Survival depends on multiple factors such as size of the tumor and stage of the disease (spread to the lymph nodes or other organs),” says Dr. Sylvester. “Tumor size has been shown to have the greatest impact, so it’s important for cats to have regular vet exams to find these tumors as early as possible, while they are still relatively small.”

“On average, cats survive one to three years or more after bilateral mastectomy with early-stage disease,” says Dr. Sylvester. “However, cats whose tumor has aggressive features or that already have evidence of cancer spread at the time of diagnosis (advanced stage) often succumb to their disease within six months. That’s why cancer staging can be helpful to determine the best treatment for an individual cat.”

A biopsy helps determine prognosis as well. Biopsy determines cancer type, tumor grade, and whether there is lymphatic invasion. You won’t have these results until after the first procedure, but it could help guide your decision-making regarding the value of having your cat endure a second procedure.

“Bilateral mastectomy can be curative for some cats,” says Dr. Sylvester. “But others will go on to develop cancer recurrence or spread.” Unfortunately, as most of us know all too well, cancer treatment never comes with a guarantee.

Should You Consider Chemo?

“Chemotherapy is not recommended for all cats after mastectomy,” says Dr. Sylvester. “Its role in treating feline mammary carcinoma is still poorly



Skylar Sylvester, DVM, is an assistant clinical professor in medical oncology at Cornell University’s College of Veterinary Medicine

What You Should Know

- ▶ The chance of a mammary lump being cancerous is high
- ▶ If the lump is malignant, it's probably spread to the other mammary chain as well
- ▶ Lumpectomies are unrealistic
- ▶ Bilateral mastectomies are painful but improve survival time
- ▶ The size of the tumor upon diagnosis is critical
- ▶ Chemotherapy is not usually recommended unless there is evidence of metastasis

understood. It is reserved for those cats that have evidence of cancer spread or aggressive histological (biopsy) features.

If chemotherapy is recommended for your cat, don't worry. "The majority of cats tolerate the chemotherapy we prescribe very well and they have a great quality of life while undergoing treatment," says Dr. Sylvester. "The most common side effect is weight loss and decreased appetite, but more significant gastrointestinal side effects such as vomiting and diarrhea are possible.

"Additionally," continues Dr. Sylvester, "low white blood cell counts can predispose them to infection. Fortunately, less than 20% of cats get sick from chemotherapy and only about 5% need to stay in hospital due to the above-mentioned side effects."

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Causes of Mammary Cancer Undetermined

Mammary cancer is the third most common feline cancer, after lymphoma and skin cancer. These growths originate in the epithelial tissue of the mammary gland and eventually spread (metastasize) to the lymph nodes, lungs, pleura, liver, adrenal gland, kidney, or other parts of the body.

The underlying causes of feline mammary gland cancer are unknown, says Margaret McEntee, DVM, professor of medical and radiation oncology at Cornell. Genetic influence has not yet been found to play a role. Likewise, while links between external cancer-causing agents like carcinogens, sunlight, viruses, and vaccine injections have been established in relation to various other forms of feline cancer, these factors do not appear relevant to the onset of mammary cancer in cats.

That said, the hormone status of a female cat is significant, specifically the roles played by the two female reproductive hormones, estrogen and progesterone. "If these hormones are given to unspayed cats as contraceptives or for behavior modification either orally or by injection," says Dr. McEntee, "their risk of mammary cancer can triple."

A cat's breed may also play a role. For example, says Dr. McEntee, "Siamese cats, for unknown reasons, have twice the risk of other breeds, and they also tend to get the cancer at an earlier age." Although the average age of cats with mammary cancer is between 10 and 12 years, the disorder can affect adult cats of all ages.

It's not yet proven whether chemotherapy makes a difference for cats with advanced disease, but it appears to be worth a try since cats tolerate it well. Results from the study mentioned earlier suggest a beneficial effect on survival time for some cats treated with adjuvant chemotherapy, but more and larger prospective studies are needed to fully evaluate the benefit of chemotherapy for cats with advanced mammary carcinoma.

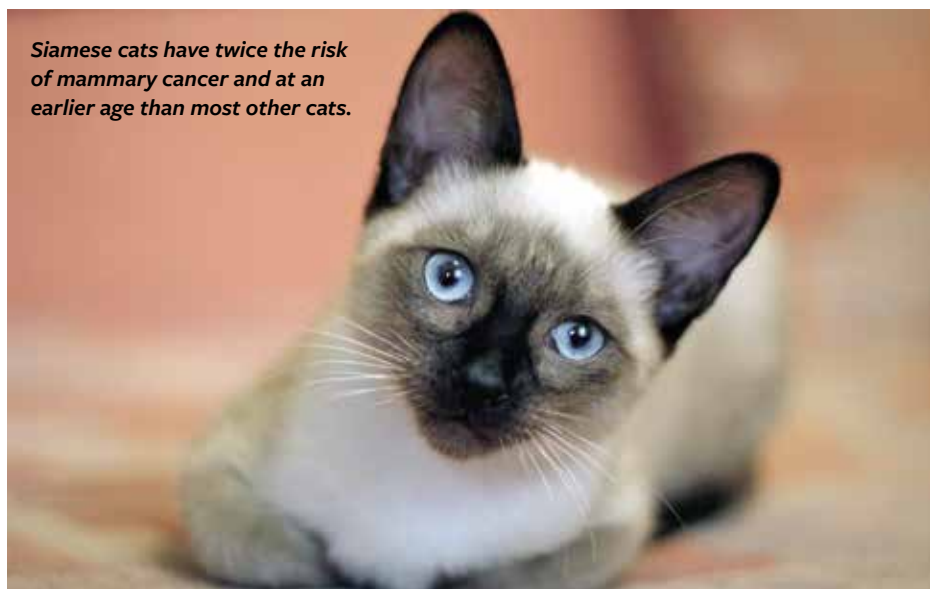
Bottom Line

Feline mammary cancer is almost always malignant and not likely to be cured.

However, the sooner a breast tumor is discovered and aggressively treated, the better. The smaller the tumor is when it is found, the better.

Sadly, if cancer spread is discovered, the likelihood of a good outcome or long survival plummets. This may make you think twice about putting your cat through multiple invasive and painful procedures. But don't despair. As in human medicine, many advancements have been made in palliative care for cats, with the goal of keeping your furry friend happy, comfortable, and with you for as long as possible. ■

Siamese cats have twice the risk of mammary cancer and at an earlier age than most other cats.



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The Availability of Compounded Medications

As of April 2023, changes in FDA regulations on compounded drugs mean you cannot risk running low on your cat's meds

Compounded drugs are medications manufactured in a different strength, form, or flavor than the FDA-approved version of the same drug. As of this year, the FDA is limiting compounded medications to those prescribed for one specific patient. In other words, a veterinary clinic can no longer have compounded medications in stock and ready to hand out; they must write a prescription. While the veterinarian will generally recommend a compounding pharmacy, the responsibility of keeping up with medication orders now falls squarely on the cat owner.

Compounded drugs are not FDA-approved, but they are usually based on FDA-approved medications. The FDA does not evaluate compounded drugs for safety or efficacy, but allows veterinarians to use their discretion in prescribing them, provided that no FDA-approved medication is available to treat the specific condition diagnosed in a particular animal.

Compounded drugs and off-label drugs are not the same. **Off-label drugs** are FDA-approved for a specific purpose, but the experience of other veterinarians suggests that the medication is safe and

efficacious for a condition other than the one for which the FDA approved the drug so veterinarians prescribe it.

Generic drugs also are not compounded drugs. Generic drugs have the same medication and dosage as their brand-name counterparts, although inactive ingredients may vary. Companies that manufacture generic drugs are monitored by the FDA.

Reasons for Compounding

The most common requests received by a compounding pharmacy include:

- ▶ Making an oral suspension from crushed pills
- ▶ Adding flavor to a medication
- ▶ Mixing multiple solutions into one medication
- ▶ Reformulating the medication as a transdermal product that will be absorbed through the skin
- ▶ Repacking the medication into a capsule or a chew
- ▶ Changing the concentration (dosage) if there is no FDA-approved version for a pet's size

What Qualifies for Compounding

For a veterinarian to prescribe a compounded medication, a cat must be under the care of the veterinarian with a valid client-veterinarian relationship. Your cat must have a medical problem that requires treatment with the drug in question. Your veterinarian must also believe that a compounded version of the medication is in the best interest of your individual cat.

A common example is a cat diagnosed with hyperthyroidism and being treated with methimazole, which is usually provided as a pill. While there are cats who are OK with being pill-

FDA Drug Approval

If the FDA approves a drug, that means the medication has been proven to the FDA's satisfaction to be safe and effective for that problem. FDA approval is a long, expensive process for the drug manufacturer, which is why it can take decades before generic versions are available. In a nutshell, the original manufacturer has a right to recoup its expenses and make a profit for the drug it has created. Once approved, the medication label must pass FDA approval and the manufacturing facility for that drug must meet FDA manufacturing standards.

daily, for most cats and their owners it is stressful—and stress is something to avoid in cats that are ill. In this case, a compounded transdermal gel on the inside of the ear can be the answer. Not all drugs can be absorbed this way, but it is a great option for those that can be.

Finding a Reputable Company

If a compounded medication is chosen for your cat, your veterinarian will guide you to a reputable company. The Pharmacy Compounding Accreditation Board, which is part of The Accreditation Commission for Health Care, accredits compounding pharmacies. If possible, choose a company with pharmacists accredited with the American College of Veterinary Pharmacists.

Be sure the company normally does veterinary prescriptions. Once your prescription is submitted, the medication will generally be shipped directly to you, although sometimes it comes to the veterinary clinic.

Bottom Line

The 2023 FDA rule change about compounding only for individual pets means that your veterinary clinic cannot keep a compounded drug on hand for easy dispensing. What this means to you is that you must keep up on your cat's drug supply so you can get a new prescription and order your meds ahead of time, before you run out.

Compounding can be a lifesaver for a difficult-to-medicate cat, especially if she has a chronic condition that requires lifelong treatment. Be smart and work through the compounding pharmacy that your veterinarian recommends. ■



A common reason for compounding is making the medicine in a form you can actually get into your cat.

Must I Feed Wet Food?

Not in most cases, just feed what your cat likes

Ask 10 people what you should feed your cat, and you'll get 15 different opinions. Wet, or canned food is extremely popular with many cat lovers and their felines, but this does not mean it is a must for every cat.

"It really depends on the health status of the cat," says Joseph J. Wakshlag, DVM, PhD, chief of nutrition at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine. Wet food has some pros over dry food, but dry food has its merits too.

Good Nutrition in Many Forms

The only two absolute requirements when feeding your cat are:

- ❶ The diet should be complete and balanced to provide your cat with everything she needs.
- ❷ Your cat needs to like and eat the food you choose to feed.

Commercially made cat foods should have an AAFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials) statement on the label declaring that the food has been formulated to meet the needs of your cat's life stage. If there is nothing like that on the label or the label says a food is "for supplemental feeding only," it is not a complete and balanced diet. Your cat can still eat this item, but it shouldn't make up the bulk of her diet, no matter what she tries to tell you.

Canned foods and kibble can both be complete and balanced. If you are making food for your cat at home, use a recipe designed by a veterinary nutritionist and don't skip any ingredients to make sure your cat is getting everything she needs.



The various flavors, textures, and brands of cat food can make choices challenging.



There's rarely reason to try to force your healthy cat to eat a particular food.

Palatability

It is easy to be so focused on the ingredients and manufacturing of cat foods that we forget the simplest, most basic requirement for cat food: Your cat must eat it.

Many cats find wet food to be tastier, but that is not always the case. Some cats really enjoy the crunch of kibble and refuse to eat anything else.

When adding a new cat to the family, it can help to offer a variety of different textures and flavors to see what she prefers. Major life changes are stressful, and having her favorite food available can encourage normal eating habits. Once your cat has settled into the new routine, you can try adding a little bit of canned food to her kibble if desired.

Pros of Wet Food

Canned food does have some benefits for your cat's health.

First is the higher moisture content. Many cats aren't big drinkers, so feeding wet food is an easy way to increase your cat's water consumption. This will help to keep your cat hydrated even if she is not drinking much and can be beneficial for cats prone to urinary tract issues or with kidney disease.

Wet food is also often higher in protein and lower in carbohydrates than dry food. This can help for diabetic cats

who need limited carbs in their diet to help regulate their insulin levels.

In a more general sense, canned foods are often the best choice for sick or injured cats because they are easy to eat and often have a rich, meaty aroma. Warming the wet food further increases the aroma, which can entice a sick cat to eat.

Cats Who Need Wet Food

While the average healthy cat will do just fine on either a wet or dry diet, some health conditions do call for a wet diet when possible.

"If there are urinary issues then canned wins, since hydration is necessary," says Dr. Wakshlag. The higher moisture content in the wet food helps to flush the urinary tract and promote urinary health.

Many veterinarians also recommend canned prescription diets for chronic kidney disease. These prescription diets are specially formulated to support your cat's kidneys, and the higher moisture content in the canned food helps to keep your cat hydrated.

Wet food may be needed short-term if your cat has oral surgery to remove teeth or a tumor from the mouth. The softer wet food is less likely to irritate your cat's mouth as she heals.

If your cat has a health condition that calls for a wet diet, make the transition gradually. If your cat flat-out refuses to eat the wet food, talk with your veterinarian about adding water to her preferred kibble or other alternatives to both keep your cat eating and support her health.

Bottom Line

While wet food is not required for cats, "I think, in general, it's good to get your cat to eat both wet and dry foods early on so you can switch to what is needed depending on the health issues with your cat," says Dr. Wakshlag. ■



Joseph J. Wakshlag, DVM, PhD, chief of nutrition at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine

Scratching After Bathing

The problem could be the shampoo, even if it has what's considered mild ingredients

Q My wife and I have 2 female Sphynx cats that we bathe once or twice a week. Within a day or two after a bath, they tend to scratch at either side of their neck and back of their ears. We use oatmeal, plant-based coconut oil, and aloe vera shampoo for bathing. We also clean their ears, swabbing regularly with a veterinarian-recommended ear cleansing solution, so I do not believe scratching is due to dirty ears. Can you help with this issue?

A Thanks for getting in touch about this issue, and I understand your concern about the scratching that you are observing. While it is not possible for me to specifically diagnose the cause from afar, perhaps a few thoughts about the situation you are describing might be helpful.

The first is that this may well be due to the bathing itself, and if this is the case, you will likely have to try different shampoo options to find out what might work. Of course, make sure that you have thoroughly rinsed away the shampoo before drying them, as shampoo residue can be irritating if left on the skin.

Another point is to make sure that you are using shampoos that are fragrance-free, mild, and, ideally, formulated for cats. You also might try a bit of an experiment and eliminate the coconut oil and oatmeal and just use shampoo, to rule out the possibility that they are experiencing sensitivity to one of these other products.

You might also consider the possibility that the itching is not due to the bathing, but to something else that

they are reacting to. Of course, having your veterinarian check carefully for ear mites, fleas, and ticks is important, as these are common causes of itching in cats. Cats can also develop allergies to things they eat, inhale, and/or come into contact with.

I think the likelihood of the latter is low, given the locations you describe them scratching, so the possibility of either food allergies or allergies to



The Sphynx cat can be completely hairless or have a very fine thin haircoat. The breed standard includes a muscular appearance.

inhaled allergens (called atopy, like hay fever in people) are reasonable potential causes to consider.

One thing that might argue against allergies, though, is that both of the cats are affected. While it would be unusual for two cats to be allergic to the same thing, it's certainly possible, particularly if they are related and may share the same genes that might predispose cats to specific allergies.

Ruling out food allergies requires a food trial that involves feeding foods that have protein sources (i.e., lamb or salmon) that are different from the ones found in their current food (i.e., chicken or beef), as proteins are the most common allergens that cause food allergies in cats. In carrying out such a trial, the cat must eat ONLY the new food, with no treats or human food, and the trial must be carried out for a minimum of eight weeks.

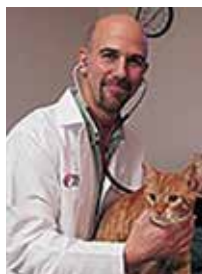
If a cat improves during such a trial, this suggests that the offending allergen was the one eliminated, and this should be avoided as a component of the cat's diet. Several trials may need to be carried out to figure out which dietary proteins are the culprit. Another option is to feed a hydrolyzed diet, which contains proteins that have been partially digested so that they can no longer be recognized by the cat's immune system that mediates allergies.

Diagnosis of atopy can be challenging, but can be informed by the history (i.e., seasonal itchiness, as may be seen with allergies to various pollens (spring/summer) and dust mites (winter, when cats may be kept indoors and heating is turned on, stirring up dust mites that may reside in duct work).

Veterinary dermatologists can also perform skin testing, during which various allergens are injected under the skin and the patient is monitored for an inflammatory reaction.

Blood tests that check for circulating antibodies to various allergens can also be performed, but these are generally not as useful as skin testing.

Please discuss these issues with your veterinary team, and you can request consultation with a veterinary dermatologist if your primary veterinarian's team has difficulty figuring out the cause of your cat's itching. Best of luck, and send an update when you can. ■



Do You Have a Health Concern?

Send your health questions to Bruce Kornreich, DVM, PhD, DACVIM, Director of the Cornell Feline Health Center and Editor-in-Chief of CatWatch. Email to catwatcheditor@cornell.edu or send by regular mail to CatWatch, 535 Connecticut Ave., Norwalk, CT 06854-1713.



Scan this code for more information on the Cornell Feline Health Center.

Coming Up ...

- ▶ **Does Your Cat Need Anti-Anxiety Medication?**
- ▶ **What's That Lump? Is It Cancer?**
- ▶ **Calicivirus: A Highly Contagious Viral Illness**
- ▶ **Anal Gland Problems In Cats**
- ▶ **Vaccine Choices for Old, Sick, or Indoor Cats**