

Did you know that cats must have meat in their diets? While vegetarianism is relatively popular in humans, it is not an option for cats.

There are a number of reasons for this.

Firstly, cats need a lot of protein in their diets. In fact they require about twice as much protein as dogs need. This is because the glucose that is needed for essential energy needs, such as the brain, comes from a fixed amount of protein digestion.

Second, the amino acid, taurine, is absolutely essential for cats and is only found in meat. If there is insufficient taurine in a cats diet they can develop heart failure (dilated cardiomyopathy), irreversible blindness (central retinal degeneration) and infertility (females). Taurine deficient diets include dog food, vegan and vegetarian diets, and home cooked diets that have not been appropriately formulated.

Third, one of the essential fatty acids, arachidonic acid which is an omega-6 fatty acid, is required by cats and is only found in animal fat. Arachidonic acid is not present in plant products which is another reason why cats must have meat in their diet.

Fourth, cats have special vitamin requirements. Cats lack the enzyme needed to produce Vitamin A from beta-carotene in plants and therefore require pre-formed vitamin A in their diet. Common sources include fish, fish oil, egg yolk and dairy products.

Also, cats do not have enough pro-vitamin in their skin to be converted to active vitamin D from exposure to UV sunlight. They therefore need dietary sources of vitamin D such as fish, fish oils, beef, liver and dairy products.

Cats need four times more pyridoxine than dogs and this can be found in organ meats, fish, wheatgerm and whole grains.

Lastly, because cats cannot convert tryptophan to niacin, they require additional niacin in their diet (again, around four times more than dogs) and this can be found in meat and fish.

Because of societal trends and people trying various diets themselves, it is understandable that pet owners want to extrapolate to their pet family members. With cats in particular, however, a properly formulated diet containing meat is crucial to a long, happy and healthy life.

