

Dear. Dr. Wise: Should I be feeding my cat dry cat food or canned cat food?

With so many options available to feed your cat, choosing a food can be very confusing. Here are a few tips that will help you sift through the products and find something that will work well for your animal. The answer really depends on your individual cat's nutritional needs and health status, as well as your own convenience.

The main difference between canned and dry foods is the amount of water each contain; canned foods have around 70% moisture where as dried foods have around 10% water. The more water contained in the food, the easier it will be on your cat's digestive system and urinary tract. Canned foods can be helpful for cats that have urinary tract disorders, as well as other conditions including diabetes mellitus. Dried food alone has not been shown to improve dental health more than canned foods, but many diets are made to specifically help your cat's teeth. By working with your family veterinarian you will be able to decide if what is right for your cat.

Dry foods and canned foods are made with different ingredients. The majority of the calories in dry foods come from carbohydrates. For some cats this works fine, but this may create weight problems for others. A canned cat food generally has less carbohydrate and more fat calories, and in some cases more protein. This can help some cats lose excess body weight. Remember that too much fat in any food is not healthy for your animal.

Dried cat foods lend themselves to free-choice feeding, whereas canned foods will likely require individual meal feedings. It is believed that the higher moisture content of canned foods makes the animal's stomach to feel more full, and help digestion, in contrast to the smaller portions of dried foods fed at a single meal. The lower water content means that each bite has more calories and nutrients; be sure to follow portion instructions for the food you select.

The take home message here is to determine, with the help of your veterinarian, your cat's nutritional and health needs, and decide what source of calories is best for your cat. Also, consider your cats feeding habits and your own lifestyle. Then you will be able to read the labels and select a food that is best for your companion.