



## Tips on Feeding your Lymphoma Kitty

By Theresa Brucker, Experiences of One of our Yahoo Group

\* \* [understand these are the views of one member of the group and anyone reading this may or may not agree with anything stated here, none of this information is meant to be medical or taken as such. Please work closely with your vet if your pet is sick.] \* \*

### General

One of the biggest challenges we have when we first get the lymphoma diagnosis is to keep our kitty eating well enough to stay strong and fight the disease.

At times you may need to assist feed or use other methods to help your cat eat. Read more about assist-feeding below.

How many different Fancy Feast flavors have you tried? (Editor Note: Many people do not believe that Fancy Feast includes ingredients that are optimal for nutrition. Fancy Feast, as a brand, is discussed here because many cats enjoy and eat it while rejecting the more 'natural' or 'nutritious' brands.) Many of us have found that our cat's tastes changed during chemo, and some of it may be because of a food aversion. Their former favorites now make them think of how they felt right before chemo started, when the lymphoma was really making them feel bad, especially if they have GI lymphoma or some kidney involvement.

So you need to find a new favorite.

Another trick I discovered was that my cat, Jean-Luc, was more likely to eat willingly in the wee hours of the morning. For some reason, sick cats seem to be more likely to eat on their own at three or four in the morning. Those first few weeks, I was up all night anyway, so I would try at 2 a.m. and 3 and 4. He ate a lot more in those overnight hours than daylight hours. I would leave some canned food out where it was accessible to him all night. He often preferred to eat some of the older stuff rather than some of the fresh stuff, and I was going to let him have anything he wanted.

I found that my kitty really liked the flavors that had a lot of gravy in them at the beginning. He would lick up all the gravy, but he didn't feel like eating the chunks. So I opened can after can to give him enough gravy to keep him going. The first week or so, he lived on Fancy Feast Tender beef and giblets. Then he graduated to minced turkey and minced beef flavors. They had lots of

gravy but also tiny, minced pieces of meat, so he would actually eat some of the meat by that point. Eventually, he got back to eating his normal flavors happily again, but the first month or two were pretty challenging.

The whole food issue is a lot of trial and error. You have to figure out what your cat will eat and then find the best among those foods. I would always have some Fancy Feast on-hand and some cans of all-meat, no-onion baby food. And remember that even among the brands that are good, there are certain flavors that may be better for your cat.

Developing a high quality food that your cat will tolerate and that provides adequate nutrition takes trial and error, and there are few generalizations we can make—each cat is different.

### Assist Feeding

You can go to the assist-feed Yahoo group home page even if you don't join and look at the picture on the homepage. It shows you how Linda, the group-owner, assist-fed one of her cats with syringe feeding and gives a brief instruction on how to do it. If you join the list, you can get a lot more advice on different methods of assist feeding.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Feline-Assisted-Feeding/>

I just know the basics – that you want to wrap the kitty in a towel or put a bib with a Velcro closure on the kitty so that you can keep them from getting too messy – since they hate getting messy on their fur. You also want to protect yourself from the mess, too, as often a lot more gets on you than in the cat.

Put the syringe in the side of the mouth, (Editor Note: assist-feed, also called 'force feeding' by soon, through the side of the mouth to minimize the possibility of lung aspiration, which happens more frequently if you feed through the front of the mouth.) and push just a little in at a time, gently, allowing time for the kitty to process and swallow. It will be a slow process, but you will be helping the cat get stronger so that they can fight this disease.

Personally, my angel Jean-Luc did not cooperate with syringe feeding. He got mad and spit out what I tried to give him. (Of course, I found out later that I was doing it all wrong, but by then, he was eating fine on his own.) So I spoon-fed him.

Spoon-feeding takes a lot of patience and persistence, because they just don't feel like eating. I used only plastic spoons, like the ones you get from Taco Bell or McDonalds. (Editors Note: You can also use baby food spoons: they are smaller. Use the ones with the plastic spoon that may have a metal handle, but do not use one with metal that goes into the mouth.) Metal spoons might

hit the teeth, which could be another cause for food-aversion. Cats can develop food-aversions quickly, making it hard to get them to start eating again even when the cause of the initial inappetence (lack of appetite) is gone.

I would put the spoon with just a touch of food on it in front of his face. He would turn away several times, and I would keep putting it in front of his face, telling him that he had to eat, and asking him to please take just a little bite, for me. I would gently touch the plastic spoon to his nose, leaving a drop of the gravy there for him to lick off. Sometimes it would take a bit of pleading and cajoling, but he would eventually take a little bite here and a little more and finally, he might realize that he was really hungry or that it really was good, and he would finally bend his head to the dish in front of him. I tried to just put little bits on the plate at a time, since a big plate of food might be overwhelming and might increase the chance for nausea. (Editor Note: You might also try picking up some food in your fingers and offering it to your cat or putting it in your cats mouth—some respond to this method well.)

#### Food Brands:

(Editor Note: We have no financial interest in any food company, and we do not recommend any brand over another—our purpose is to promote high quality cat food with adequate nutrition, and we have picked a couple of brands to discuss in-depth. Many other brands are great, but you must READ THE LABELS!)

Some of the brands that are low-carb and good quality protein include canned Petguard, Wellness, Nature's Variety Prairie, Lick Your Chops, and there are some others. (Editor Note: Some members prefer low-carb diets, since there is some evidence that carbohydrates feed the cancer cells.) Merrick's new line of canned foods has several good quality no-grain foods, too, but it may be too high in vegetables for some cats.

Read the ingredients for any food that you are considering. (A lot of these are not available at local stores, so you may have to order them on-line.) [Editor Note: There are a number of places you can order online. Several of us have found a large variety available on [www.petfooddirect.com](http://www.petfooddirect.com) although there are many good web sites.]

In my opinion, the best foods are those that do not have corn, wheat, or soy, (note opinion of author only) and certainly quality foods contain no meal, no by-products. Some may contain other vegetables, which contribute to nutrition, if not included in excess.

#### Dry Food:

Since there is some evidence that carbohydrates feed cancer cells, many people whose cats have lymphoma are interested in feeding a low-carb diet. There are

very few dry foods that are low-grain and only one that I know, at this writing, no-grain. The low-grain one is Chicken Soup for the Cat Lover's Soul. I recently got a sample sent from a friend of the new no-grain dry food for my IBD cat. She has not been able to tolerate any dry food before, but she seems to be able to handle this one - no diarrhea, and not vomiting so far. It's called EVO by Innova, but it is very hard to find.

Canned food is generally preferred because cats get much of their moisture from their food. Cats do not always drink a lot of water, and the lack of moisture is hard on their kidneys. We really want to be proactive in keeping our kitties' other organs working well with their bodies dealing with lymphoma and chemotherapy, so giving the canned food seemed the best choice for me, especially since there are so few choices of dry.

### Garlic in Cat Food, Onions

(Editor Note: Some cat food, like Wellness brand contain small amounts of processed garlic. Onions cause liver disease in cats as would large amounts of raw garlic.) I would not be concerned about the garlic in Wellness.

Some research conducted by nutritionists and cat specialists assured us that the processing changed the make-up of the garlic, but it is not the same with onion. Therefore, onion in any form remains dangerous, and garlic is only dangerous in its raw form. And, if you are making home-made food, do not add garlic, raw or otherwise.

Onions should never be given to a cat in any form. That's why we always remind people to look through the ingredients of baby food, and if they list "seasonings" without listing them, call the company before you give it to your cat.

### My own experience with Anemia:

Cats with lymphoma who are having chemo may also tend toward anemia. Here is some information that I have found from my own experience:

I just did a case study on my IBD (irritable bowel disease) cat for the anemia list on yahoo showing the details of her anemia. She was eating Wellness for a whole year, and her HCT (hematocrit) was at the high end of normal after that. Wellness is the food that she eats the best and does best on. Her stools have solidified, she has gained weight, her coat looks beautiful, eyes bright, tail up, and more active than anyone would expect for a 20-year-old cat. She did develop mild anemia after being diagnosed and treated for hyperthyroidism, which is not uncommon in hyperT cats (cats with hyperthyroid). I tried at that time to cut out the Wellness to play it on the safe side, just in case it would harm my already-mildly-anemic cat. Her IBD symptoms started to return. Loose stools, some diarrhea, and generally, not feeling as good. So I put

Wellness canned food back into her diet. And she did much better. She still has mild anemia, usually with an HCT of 24 to 29%. She seems to feel fine at those levels. I do try to give her Pettinic or another iron supplement, and that helps.

#### Home-made Diets:

(Editors Note: There are a number of books and websites with instructions on making nutritious, fresh home made diets for your cat.)

As noted above, if you are making home made food, do not add garlic, raw or otherwise, and do not sprinkle garlic on other cat food to get the cat to eat. Anytime you are making a home made diet, you have to be very careful to make sure that you are putting in the right ingredients and enough of the supplements that cats need. For instance, there is not enough taurine in human food for cats, so you would have to add taurine if you are going to feed a home-made diet. (I got some at a health food store in case my kitty was going to be eating baby food for a while. In the late 1980s, cat food companies found that lack of taurine can cause dilated cardiomyopathy, and they increased the amount of taurine included in ALL prepared cat foods.) The occasional baby food or chicken breast is not going to hurt, (Editor Note: all meat contains taurine but some is lost in cooking, so pet food companies supplement the taurine in their products.) as long as they are getting cat food for some of their meals, but if they are not eating any food designed for cats, you do need to add taurine.

#### About Tuna:

I would be cautious giving tuna or low-sodium tuna for more than just a treat. If you want to give a little bite as a treat after taking medicines, that should be fine, but tuna is not generally a good main diet, since it does not have a full range of nutrition and cats can get hooked on it. But when a cat refuses to eat anything else, our opinion is that it is better to eat a poor food than no food at all.