



Chelsea Animal Hospital Inc.

Anne M. Carroll, DVM, CVA
Betty Jo Black, DVM, CVH

276 VT Rte 110 - PO Box 277
Chelsea, Vermont 05038
(802) 685-3232

Alternatively Speaking: Food as Medicine Dr. Anne Carroll, DVM, CVA

Every Friday night in our house is movie night. We get home from work, race to do chores, make a quick dinner and sit down to whatever flick we have negotiated to watch. The night is special partly for the movie, but also because we usually make fish sticks and boxed mac and cheese for dinner. We don't eat "junk" food that often but as an occasional treat it's fine. We mainly eat fresh whole foods that have not been pulverized into new shapes, dehydrated, or preserved with all kinds of chemicals. We try to eat this way because we know that the better we eat, the more our bodies will have the resources with which to maintain their health and avoid illness.

What I still find mystifying is why we typically do not think like this when feeding our pets. Ever since the first grain company realized they could feed pets as well as livestock, our pets have been eating dry processed food. The convenience and low expense made it very popular, and the lure of having a "complete and balanced" meal without having to think at all sealed the deal and Fido and Kitty started missing out on fresh food. While the dog food corporations tell us this food is the best nutritionally and should be fed exclusively, holistic practitioners do not agree. Processed diets contain high glycemic starches and use synthetic nutrients to replace all the real food value destroyed in processing. These forms of nutrients are a shadow of the biological value of the proteins, antioxidants, vitamins and enzymes found in fresh foods. Also, every species has evolved specific digestive and metabolic processes in order to eat the diets they have evolved on. So to replace meat, bones, cartilage, and organ meats with processed starches and grains can stress systems, especially over years of exclusive feeding.

Realistically, not everyone or every pet can eat a perfect fresh diet all the time. But since most pets eat processed foods most or all of the time, it is even more important to include diet as part of their medical management when illness occurs. We all know the famous line from Hippocrates, "Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food" but my favorite is a Chinese proverb that proclaims "The man who takes his pill but neglects his diet wastes his doctor's skills." This echoes the philosophy that diet is not only a tool to prevent illness, but it can help treat it as well, or if left unaddressed, can impair successful treatment.

There are a wealth of opportunities to use diet as part of a medical plan. Most ancient medical philosophies dictated including or avoiding certain foods based a person's body type or condition. Many cultural traditions advocate eating or avoiding certain foods during illness. Modern science, in explaining how cells and organs work and what they require, provides insight into how we can support stressed tissues by feeding them better. Combining all of these sources of knowledge together and utilizing it as part of a medical plan is a large part of the holistic medical approach.

Two examples where diet did the majority of the healing are Button and India. Button was underweight and had diarrhea from the day she was brought home as a kitten. She did not play or do much more than sleep all day. Most every conventional approach was tried with her including antibiotics, probiotics, dewormers, canned food, dry food, and prescription food. However, nothing seemed to work and her weight dropped over several weeks and her labwork started to show signs of liver stress. Then there is India, a 6 year old Bengal cat, who also struggled with diarrhea as a kitten due to a rare parasite. With treatment his condition did improve until he was about 3 years old. That's when he began having diarrhea again and despite antibiotics, prescription food, and a host of medications to address nausea, he slowly dropped from 17 to 14 ½ pounds over the course of a year. He was not as active, felt grumpy and

hunched from a crampy tummy and did not want to play or be with the family. For both of these cats, the answer turned out to be a quality commercially available raw diet. These raw diets are very plain, minimally processed meat and none of the vegetables or starches that cats are not designed to process naturally. For both cats the response was immediate. The diarrhea stopped and they returned to being thriving kitties. Button started to finally grow and became the proper terror all kittens are, while India gained 2 pounds back in a couple of months was his happy content self again for the last year.

For both cats, veterinary prescription diets were not the answer. Prescription foods are specially designed to help an impaired organ or body system function, mainly by reducing nutrients that would be difficult for the body to manage when it is impaired by illness. These diets are engineered to let the body work around its problem more than trying to feed the impaired body as a whole. In certain cases of sudden severe illness, these diets can be extremely useful in taking some work load off the body until the acute crisis has past. But for chronic illness, the limitation of normal nutrients may not be ideal for all patients. I find that in many cases, even those involving organ failure, supporting the organs so they can heal while feeding the body ideal nutrients can be a much better path to long term recovery. For Button and India, it took a diet much closer to their natural one to allow them to thrive. Raw diets are not for every pet, but just as we take care to feed the exotic animals in the zoo exactly what they eat in the wild to keep them healthy, understanding how our domestic dogs and cats work internally to digest and process nutrients gives us valuable information regarding their ideal diet. Just because we have been able to formulate a meal that most pets have managed to adapt to, does not mean we are meeting their needs to thrive as nature intended. Perhaps instead, by feeding all processed foods, we have burdened them with the same woes our society has including obesity, chronic illness, inflammation, digestive complaints and arthritis to name a few.

Food therapy is not just for digestive complaints. Veterinarians have been treating skin allergies with diet for some time. Also, in a previous article I wrote about treating cats with urinary issues with food. Any body organ can be supported by providing the nutrients those systems need most to thrive. Another example is Millie, a tiger kitty who had sudden elevations of her liver and kidney values nine years ago when she was 10 years old. Despite a battery of tests, no cause could be found for her problems. She was started on supplements for the liver and kidneys that were made entirely of whole foods including organic vegetables and organ glandulars that are minimally processed to preserve the nutrients and enzymes and mimic having eaten them fresh and whole as best as possible. The following year her blood values were normal and she continued to thrive. As she has aged I have had to adjust her therapy to include a Chinese herb and another whole food supplement for adrenal and muscular support. Today her kidney and liver values are mildly elevated and she is a bit thin, but she is eating well and a happy senior citizen at age 19.

Jefferson, another cat, had similar results. Three years ago he tested positive for mild kidney elevations when we had surgery for a bladder stone removal. His values did improve after his procedure but slowly continued to elevate. Two years ago he was started on whole food support for his kidneys and his values slowly lowered and were in the mid-normal range at his last checkup. He will be turning 13 this March.

The debate over ideal feeding will always exist, and rightly so, since designing the best diet is more an individual 'ideal' than a one-size-fits-all. Despite the debate on content, no one disputes that food does play a significant role in health. The best approach is to include food as part of your annual exam with your veterinarian. Holistic exams evaluate your pet right from the start, identifying weaknesses and match them up with the diet that supports health while avoiding feeding things that are stressful to their biology. Given nutritional tools and avoiding too many insults, animals like people are very good at keeping themselves healthy. When illness does occur, consider nutrition a valuable tool to help treat disease and promote healing. After all, you are what you eat!

Dr. Anne Carroll is owner of the Chelsea Animal Hospital where she practices both conventional medicine and surgery as well as several alternative modalities including traditional Chinese acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine. Her associate Dr. Betty Jo Black brings classical homeopathy to the practice. For more information on alternative veterinary medicine visit their website at www.chelseaanimalhospital.com

4 Legs and a Tail Spring 2016