

Can Cats Thrive on a Plant-Based Diet?

A review of the conventional wisdom, data, and individual cases

Introduction

Feeding cats a plant-based diet can certainly raise controversy, to say the least. Many will claim this practice is animal abuse while failing to recognize that the animals killed for the cats' food were also abused and subsequently slaughtered.

Aren't cats obligate carnivores?

Cats are obligate carnivores. People assume this to mean that cats need meat, but that is not what an obligate carnivore is. An obligate carnivore is defined as an animal that needs specific nutrients only naturally found in animal flesh. In the case of cats, these nutrients include taurine and preformed Vitamin A (retinol), among others.

Cats need nutrients, not ingredients. The source of these ingredients is not of consequence, and the data discussed later confirms this. Most taurine in meat-based cat foods is actually added synthetically due to the proteins being denatured during processing. This same synthetic taurine is also added to commercial plant-based cat foods and is chemically identical to naturally occurring taurine in animal flesh.

Is it natural?

This is an appeal to nature fallacy. Cats also do not naturally eat cooked sheep, cattle, swine, or chickens pumped full of antibiotics, yet these are found in traditional commercial cat food. Medication is not natural either, yet most people wouldn't argue against veterinary care. Cats are opportunistic carnivores who hunt small animals to survive, but inside our homes, they are far removed from that environment and rely on us for nutrition and stimulation. What matters is health outcome data.

But cats can't digest carbohydrates!

Commercially available plant-based cat food isn't high in carbs. But also, this is a false statement. Evidence shows that not only are carbs not harmful to cats as some believe, but that they have no issues digesting them [8]. "Cats have considerable metabolic flexibility and carbohydrates can provide a protein-sparing effect, meaning that less protein is required for gluconeogenesis when dietary carbohydrates are provided. So long as dietary protein needs are met, cats are able to adapt well to either high-fat or high-carbohydrate diets."

Why are you forcing them to be vegan?

Cats are not and cannot be vegan, as veganism is an ethical position that cats do not have the agency to adopt. However, health outcome data shows that cats can survive and thrive on a plant-based diet.

Regardless of what you feed your cat, they are being “forced” to eat that food, whether it is plant-based or animal-based. So if vegans are “forcing” their cats to “follow their philosophy”, then meat eaters are “forcing their cats to follow their philosophy” as well. The truth is that cats tend to be picky and won’t eat something they don’t want to, but they are not being forced to do anything when they willingly eat the food we place in front of them.

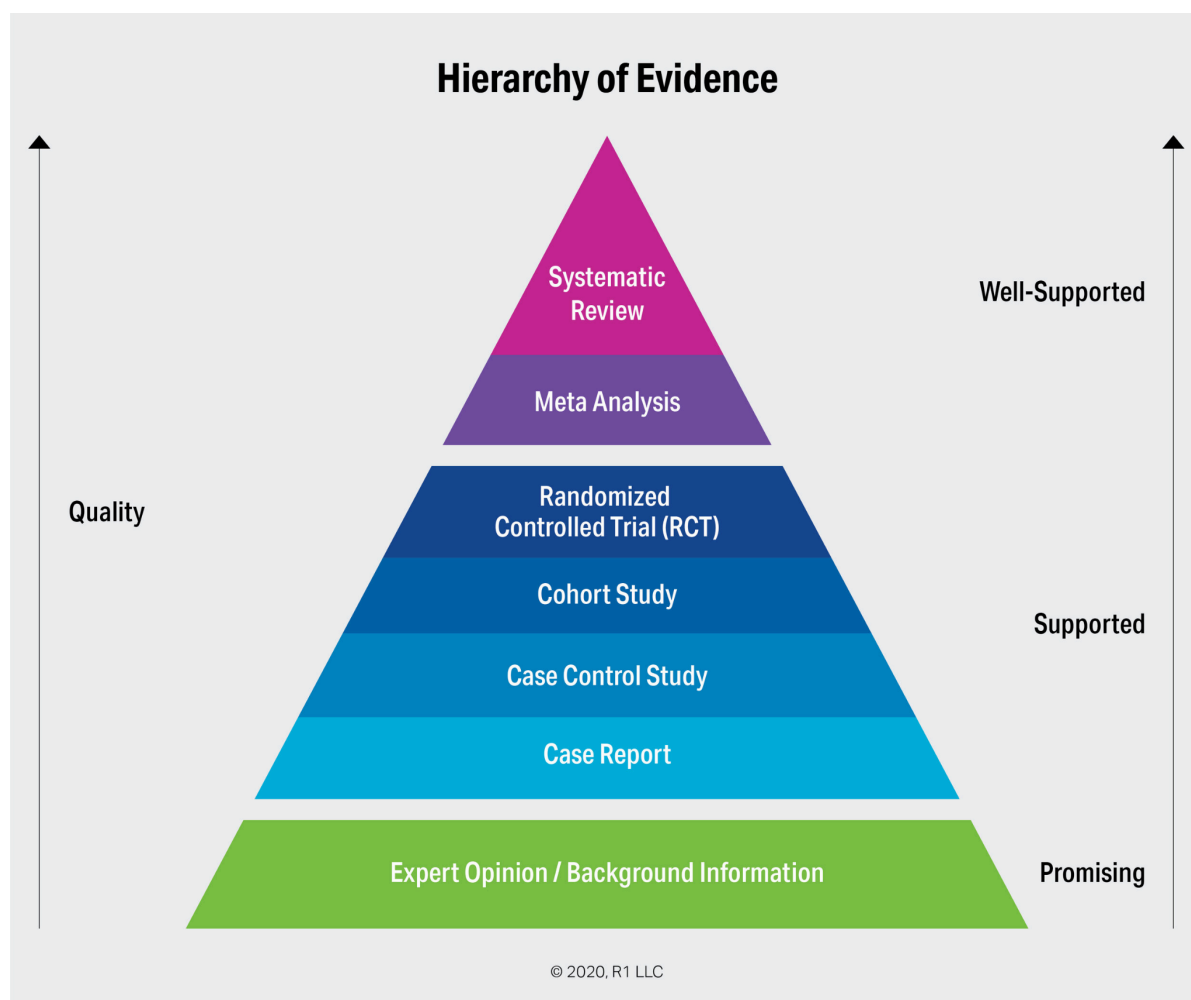
If your cat had a chance, wouldn't they hunt birds?

And? I’m sure they’d also avoid going to the vet if they could. Children would choose to eat candy for lunch if they had the chance.

And, barring a debate between indoor and outdoor cats, they don’t have the autonomy to do what they want. They live where we want, poop in the boxes we give them, and eat what we feed.

My vet/An online article says that cats need meat.

This is known as an appeal to authority fallacy. “Experts” are frequently wrong on things, and vets aren’t nutritionists. Additionally, expert opinion is the lowest on the hierarchy of evidence.



I can find an “expert” saying anything, and there are experts promoting plant-based cat foods. In fact, the co-author of several of the studies cited below, Dr. Sarah Dodd, has a PhD in veterinary nutrition and states that a plant-based diet for cats is safe and healthful.

But what about this study showing some vegan cat foods to be incomplete in Brazil and Germany [5] [6]?

What about this study [7] showing that only 38% of dry meat-based cat foods and only **6%** of wet meat-based cat foods are nutritionally complete and fully adhere to regulatory guidelines? In addition, fish-based foods were found to have high levels of heavy metals.

These papers don’t reveal the brands they studied, but [5] lists the ingredients. Only one was cat food (the rest were dog food), and that food was purchased at a local Brazilian store and isn’t any of the mainstream commercial brands (Amicat, Benevo, Nature’s HUG, and Evolution).

The full text of study [6] is not available. It is unclear whether the FEDIAF and AAFCO guidelines directly correlate to long-term health. Either way, this “problem” is certainly not unique to plant-based cat foods, as seen in [7].

That being said, all major brands of nutritionally complete plant-based cat foods say they comply with agencies regulating cat nutrition. Benevo is FEDIAF compliant, Nature’s HUG and Evolution both exceed AAFCO standards, and Amicat is compliant with both FEDIAF and AAFCO. You can always check specific compliance on a manufacturer’s website.

The data

The data is clear: Cats can survive and thrive on a plant-based diet in the long term.

Systematic review

A systematic review, looking at 49 studies, concluded that “there is no convincing evidence of major impacts of vegan diets on dog or cat health.” [1]

Multiple reviewed studies showed positive health outcome data.

The study mentioned polymyopathy and anemia!

The nature of a systematic review is that all literature on the topic is reviewed. One study (29 in the reference list of the systematic review) is an experimental study from 1992 where some cats were fed an experimental *human vegetarian diet*, some with potassium supplementation and some without. The purpose of that experiment was to study the effect of potassium supplementation. You can see the full paper here:

<https://sustainablepetfood.info/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Veg-feline-diets-Leon-et-al-1992.pdf>

The other study (30 in the reference list of the systematic review) was a case study of two cats presenting to the emergency room with anemia who happened to be fed a plant-based diet.

The systematic review itself states that these are low-quality studies.

Guardian outcome data

Studies [2] and [3] use guardian-reported health outcome data. While this is not as robust as clinical data, it’s the best data we have, and both show positive health outcomes. The positive health outcomes were not statistically significant in [2] but were present nonetheless, and the review mentions that these results are consistent across independent studies and should therefore not be disregarded.

Food analysis

Study [4] analyzed the nutritional content of various commercial cat foods, both plant-based and meat-based, and most “had acceptable or superior standards at nearly all stages examined, throughout the design, manufacturing, transportation, and storage phases, with plant-based diets slightly superior to meat-based diets overall.”

Anecdotes

Here is a small subset of people who have fed their cats plant-based, including some who have done so for more than 10 years. One purports to have fed their cat plant-based for 13 years before they passed away at the age of 20, which is well above the average cat lifespan.

Astrophe, a neutered male Siamese cat, lived 18 years 5 months. He was 3 months old when I adopted him from my veterinarian's office. He was raised on VegeKit until he was one year old and then on VegeCat, Ami, and Benevo, making it 18 years 2 months on a plant-based diet.



[REDACTED]

My girl passed recently. She was nearly 20. It was a gentle passing in my arms. It was just her time. She was vegan 13 yrs. And had always been incredibly healthy and fit for her age.

4w Like

9   



[REDACTED]

My Dora is 16 and has been vegan for 15 years.



4w Like

25 ❤️ 👍 😲



5h

I have a cat that has eaten vegan cat food for 8 yrs and is now 18, she's healthy before and after.

From my research cats are obligate carnivores in the same way we're obligate herbivores. Not that we cannot eat things other than plants and not that they cannot eat something other than meat. What it means is that we must get Vitamin C, and that is only found in sufficient quantities in plants and cats must get carnitine and taurine which is only found in sufficient quantities in meat.

However, carnitine is somewhat and taurine is largely destroyed in the high and long temperature cook times of kibble. So, to meet standards in the US manufacturers add it in after. Pretty much all dry cat food is fortified with carnitine so it doesn't matter if you're feeding your cat vegan or meat based kibble, for both types it's the same added synthetic carnitine.

The only argument that meat based cat food is better is for canned and those "fresh" packages which are not cooked at such high temps and are generally wet which protects the carnitine but I think every processes has to have taurine added back to it.



← Reply



3



33






I had/have ten cats over the course of 30 plus years including my current two, that have been 100% plant based for their lives (save for my first two that had their food changed to plant based). The ones who are no longer with me sadly passed from regular feline problems like kidney and heart disease. All of my cats had regular checkups with non vegan veterinarians who knew they were being fed plant based and gave them good bills of health throughout their lives. When sadly any passed it was due to maladies that afflict all cats and nothing to do with malnutrition.

Cats need nutrients, not meat. Because I've dearly loved all my guys, I didn't want to have the concentration of pesticides, hormones, antibiotics and other chemicals that have bioaccumulated in the bodies of the miserably treated farmed animals in their small bodies. Although it may be relatively uncommon, there are many others who also deeply care for their cats and feed them plant based food. It's very important to know that it's not a matter of just eliminating the animal products from their diet and giving them vegetables, grains and beans. There are commercially available plant based cat foods (and also a supplement to add to foods you can make yourself) that contain the nutrients essential for cats. People want to criticize that it's unnatural to feed a cat this way. If left to fend on their own no cat would be eating beef, poultry or fish. They'd be eating rodents, other small animals and insects, none of which are contained in common store bought cat foods. Fresh bowls of water and veterinary care would also be unnatural.


It's also important to note that they all my guys were eager eaters and enjoyed their food. Over the years I have used Ami, Benevo and Evolution using both canned and dry versions of Benevo and Evolution (I now always wet any kibble, they especially like it when I use aquafaba). Beyond the associated cruelty to farmed animals, I'm also very concerned with the mix of additional hormones, antibiotics, other drugs and pesticides that they are given or have in their food. These are being concentrated and bioaccumulated in their bodies and then are going into our loved cats small bodies. We don't want them in our bodies and their bodies are much smaller than ours. In addition to their regular food, they have been given treats with Tofurky slices being a pretty much universal favorite. Cooked veggies have also been enthusiastically received treats with some different favorites including broccoli, yellow beans, green beans, cauliflower, sweet potato and butternut squash and corn. Others loved cucumbers, tomatoes, avocados and cantaloupe with one liking peaches and another watermelon. Nutritional yeast sprinkled on or mixed in with their food is something else they really like. I love my guys and feed them plant based (exclusive) to help keep them healthy and am glad not to contribute to the exploitation, cruelty and deaths of other beings.

It's true, that a cat nor any other species of animal can be vegan. Veganism is a way of life and a practice that is done by humans. But they can be healthy and happy on a 100% plant based diet

 3h
vegan 20+ years

I've been feeding cats with plant based cat foods for over 25 years and none of them have starved. What personal experience or other evidence do you have to suggest that feeding cats on a nutritionally complete plant based diet will make them "starve"?

⋮ ↩ 🔔 ⬆ 2 ⬇

 • 10m
abolitionist 🏆 Top 5% Commenter


Our cat has been on plant based kibble her whole life. She's 5 now. No issues from her diet and her non vegan vets agree.

⋮ ↩ Reply 🔔 ⬆ 1 ⬇

 1h

We are using Emi Cat and Benovo foods since she is a little baby. 5 years later and her bloodwork is still perfect. No health problems. This is not even a trolley problem, folks. If you flip the switch from the track with the many slaughtered animals (in the cat food) to the other track, then no animal will suffer. There is nothing on the other track. It is all just hearsay and supposed "common sense," and even Vegans on here regurgitate it like mindless large language models...

⋮ ↩ Reply 🙌 1 🔥 0 ⬇

 15 years.

4w Like

6 👍 ❤

My cat has been vegan for 4 years. She is 20 now. Ask me anything.

I've seen a lot of posts in here saying that cats are carnivores and it's impossible to raise a vegan cat.

My cat has been vegan for 4 years and she is doing well.

Here are a few pictures of her: <http://imgur.com/a/Ej1Aw>

Ask me anything about my cat and/or her diet.



My 3 cats have been 100% vegan for at least 7 years and are in excellent health.

Automatically translated

2w Like

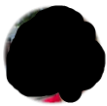
2



My cat has been plant-based for 7 years in February - thriving with no health issues!

4w Like

5



My two sibling cats are about 13 years old. They've been eating soaked vegan kibble for about 5 years and they are in great health. Prior to their diet change, the male got a urethra blockage and almost died. The vet said food needs to be high moisture, so that's why I feed them soaked kibble. I fill a container with kibble and completely cover with water and allow it all to absorb. I keep it in the fridge and they each get 1/2 cup, twice a day. Occasionally I sprinkle brewers yeast on it and they get very excited for that 😊



4w Like

9  



2:24 PM
yes my cats are still vegan and healthy



2:26 PM
Awesome, how long have they eaten plant-based at this point?



2:44 PM
7 years i think



• 3h

vegan

👤 Top 5% Commenter

My 8 year old adoptive cat (female) has been eating Benovo dry kibble for about 4 years, with a few exceptions. Blood levels are in normal range and I have not seen any negative behavioural changes. She gets enough water, also because a lot of the time there's wheat grass available.

I still would not adopt another carnivore since I've become vegan. I cannot dismiss the possibility that I will have to buy animal products again at some point.



← Reply



2



[REDACTED]

*they and so far they have been thriving on plants for almost 4 years.

4w

Like

8



[REDACTED]

Mine for been vegan for 4 years now and they are thriving.

4w

Like

5



[REDACTED]

So far my cat is almost 8 and still plant based.

4w

Like

4





Sneha Ramji

I fed mine from about nine weeks on benevo, mostly dry but sometimes wet. I also gave them coconut oil to every morning and night to add calories.

Also I add cranberry supplement tinctures for cats sometimes. However my cats are very good at drinking water. I also give them little treats of vegan ham and chicken from Quorn. To increase water intake sometimes I add small pieces to a small amount of water for them to consume more water. They are now five and healthy.

Reply



2



Zen Florida, USA

Veteran

July 2013

My friend have a vegan cat going on 6 years of that diet. It's perfectly healthy. Her vet agrees it's perfectly healthy also. Mostly because she actually know how to feed it, unlike most people. Feeding a cat potatoes and pasta??? Come on, that is just plain ignorance...That is not even close to how you feed a cat a vegan diet. These people obviously had absolutely no idea what they were doing! If you are not *extremely* educated on the subject, it's certainly not recommended.

A dog on the other hand is quite easy to feed a vegetarian diet and can easily be quite healthy on a vegetarian diet. The 6th oldest dog in the Guinness book of world records was a strict vegan. Lived to be almost 27 years old.



 5mo
Vegan

I've been feeding my cat a vegan diet for 3 years and she's perfectly healthy. I've tried different brands on two different cats and AML is the preferred one. She seems to love it.



← Reply



4



I have a plant based cat of 3 1/2 years ❤️ it was awesome to see him go from overweight and bloated with tummy problems to going plant based and now being a 12 year old playful happy kitty that lost a healthy amount of weight. He can jump so high when playing now!! It's so neat 😊



4w Like

5





• 3mo ago •

vegan 5+ years

Top 10% Commenter

We feed AMI Cat to our two cats since the day we adopted them.
They're healthy and they love it :)



2



Reply



But glad this topic is being brought up! I have no experience on the subject personally-not a cat person myself- but my sister has two cats that have been on a plant based diet for a little over three years now and doing great! The whole "it's abuse and unnatural to force them to eat XYZ" is so annoying for her to deal with from people, especially because... what are you doing forcing them to eat food out of a can rather than birds or small animals they hunt for themselves? Or vet care, that's not natural at all!



Cats are obligate carnivores. If you want a vegan pet get a bunny.

4d

Like

Reply

2



, so I should have left my cat, who lived past 20 on a plant-based diet, homeless? Interesting.

4d

Like

Reply

2



Just bought some can't wait to see how my cat likes it!
She's already vegan for over 3 years now

23w

Like

Reply

51



• 14m ago

I've done Benevo or Ami for almost a decade now. The main nutrient they need is carnitine, which is added to all dry cat food bc it's destroyed at high long cooking temperature, so even if the cat food has meat it still needs to have carnitine added at the end.



Reply



Award



Share





[redacted] • 1m ago

I have been feeding my cat Ami cat, Benevo and VeggieAnimals for almost 4 years now since he was 6 months old. He is healthy and active, so feeding a cat a plant-based diet is definitely possible.

Vote Reply Award Share ...



[redacted] [Follow](#)

[redacted] my cats have been fully vegan going on 12 years! Beautiful healthy cats, absolutely no health issues ever! I'm excited to try this wet food, as they've had different brands of dry kibble including amni cat benovo and evolution.

15w Like Reply

5



[redacted]
[redacted]

[redacted], so many healthy animals who are fed a nutritious plant based diet, would not otherwise have homes if they weren't adopted by the good people who give them love and care. Most of them would likely be dead because they don't have homes. Is that what you want? I had a vegan cat who lived to be 20. All of my cats I had before him, who were fed a supposedly quality and appropriate diet, passed by or before age 16 of kidney or liver failure. Try educating yourself, before coming on a page to give people a hard time.

16w Like Reply

6



• 17m



Top 1% Commenter

I don't trust any studies this small. That said, I've lived with three +20yr old vegan cats that didn't have any of those side effects. I've definitely met many more vegan cats, I'm just speaking of the very old ones and the others had none of these issues either. Obviously this is all anecdotal which is where I'd place the vegan cat studies that even pro-vegan cat.



2





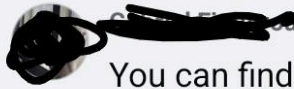
8 years. All five of them. The younger three turned 8 August 31st. Mama came pregnant and with two 8-week-old kittens, so the older two (now 8 & 1/2) were given meat before they came to me, but only briefly a couple times since, when vet convinced me to try it because of crystals. The older boy caught mice on the catio twice as well -- the base was covered to prevent that happening again. The younger three nursed with their mom until 5 months, and have never eaten meat. Tried feeding one meat a few years back when vet insisted, but she wouldn't touch it -- turned out she had asthma, and meat clearly wouldn't have helped. Vets and others are always impressed with how healthy they look.



11h

Reply





Admin

You can find a lot of similar threads here, but a lot of us have had cats that have been fed solely vegan food for over a decade. I have had several cats that were fed plantbased cat food for most of their lives. My last senior cat Peanut passed in 2024, but he was fed exclusively vegan from the time I adopted him after finding him as a feral kitten in 2009. Before him, I had Baby (2006-2022) and Trixie (2004-2020) who were fed vegan from the time I adopted them as young adult cats in 2008. I also had Sky, Winky, and Nod who were fed vegan for the last 5 or 6 years of their lives, starting as senior kitties.

This picture from 2010 shows my previous generation of kitties. I miss them all.

Peanut (2009 - 2024)

Baby (2006 - 2022)

Winky (2000 - 2014)

Sky (1999 - 2012)

Nod (2000 - 2014)

Trixie (2004 - 2020)

My current cats are all young (oldest two are 3 years old), but they have all been eating vegan since I adopted them.



6h

Reply



View 3 replies

Conclusion

Cats can survive and thrive on a plant-based diet. There is no evidence to suggest any negative health outcomes as a result of feeding cats commercial-grade plant-based kibble on a long-term basis. Arguments made against a plant-based diet for cats tend to be founded on conventional wisdom and logical fallacies without any supporting evidence that the source of nutrients affects cat health.

It isn't animal abuse (quite the opposite, in fact), and paying for innocent individuals to be selectively bred to be unnaturally large, mutilated without anesthetic, confined in tiny cages, raped and forcibly impregnated, and then loaded onto a truck that takes an arduous journey to a slaughterhouse where they will scream and thrash in a gas chamber or be shot in the head or hung upside down and electrocuted is actual animal abuse, especially considering the data showing that this is wholly unnecessary.

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