

What Should I Feed My Diabetic Cat?

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Dear Most Esteemed and Knowledgeable Kitties:

I just recently adopted a diabetic cat. We told he needs special food for diabetic cats. It is \$65 a case and a case lasts a week and a half. Do I have to use this prescription food or can I use other foods that are low in calories? He is allowed 375 cal per day. And what does kcal mean on animal food? I just think that almost \$200 a month on food is crazy. We do test his glucose at home. He gets 5 units of insulin at 8 a.m. and 5 units at 8 p.m. I hope you have advice or can point me in the right direction.

~ Jessica

Thomas: Well, Jessica, you picked the right kitties to ask about this question!

Bella: We've got lots of experience with diabetes, thanks to me.

Tara: What? You have diabetes, Bella?

Bella: Well, I did. [I've been in remission for more than three years now](#) — haven't needed a drop of insulin!

Tara: That's amazing. Congratulations, Bella!

Bella: A lot of it had to do with the food Mama gives us, actually. That, and I grew up and my pancreas decided to start working right, I guess.

Thomas: Okay, so first things first: Before we even get started with our advice, we want to make sure you know that we're not veterinarians, and what we say on this subject comes from our own personal experience. This may or may not work for you, but just like Mama did (and still does) with Bella, you've got to work closely with your own vet to manage your cat's diabetes.

Bella: That said, most veterinarians now agree that cats do best on a high-protein, low-carbohydrate diet — by which we mean that the food's content is less than 10 percent carbohydrates. This is especially true for diabetic cats because carbohydrates convert into sugars and can cause “spikes” in a cat's blood glucose level.

Tara: There are a lot of foods that fit this guideline, including foods you can buy at the grocery store.

Bella: Mama feeds us a commercially prepared raw diet (with our vet's blessing), but not everyone is ready to go there and that's just fine!

Thomas: One of the most helpful sites any diabetic cat guardian can use is FelineDiabetes.com. That and the site's [Feline Diabetes Message Board](#) are hugely awesome resources for support and education about diabetes. We highly recommend that you join the message board.

Bella: There's a great list of the protein, carbohydrates, fat and calories of just about every cat food made, and you can find it at Dr. Lisa Pierson's website, catinfo.com.

Tara: Speaking of calories — to answer your question about what kcal means, it's the same thing as calories. "Calories" just a shorthand for lay people. The medically accurate word for calories is "kilocalories," or kcal.

Thomas: You sure are smart, Tara. Can I come under the couch and give you a kiss?

Tara: Eek! **grrrrr**

Thomas: It's okay, Tara. I'll try again another time.

Bella: We'd strongly recommend that you bring your new kitty in to your vet for a checkup, if you haven't already, and talk to him or her about how to manage your cat's diabetes. Specifically, we'd recommend that you talk about nutrition and the possibility of trying non-prescription foods at home.

Tara: The fact that you home test (yay for being so awesome!) should make your vet more willing to let you try different diets at home because you'll be more able to monitor how your cat's food affects his blood sugar level.

Bella: Did you know that at the shelter where Mama met me, they fed us Friskies Classic Pate and several varieties of Fancy Feast? They're low-carb, high-protein foods that are quite affordable.

Thomas: Avoid any canned cat foods in gravy, because the gravy is made with ingredients that raise the carbohydrate level significantly.

Tara: And of course, don't feed any kibble because it's mostly carbohydrates!

Bella: On a personal note, I really want to thank you for adopting a diabetic cat. I know it's hard for us sugar kitties to find forever home because caring for a diabetic can be a lot for most people to deal with. Many purrs to you!

Thomas: You may find that once your cat is on a low-carb, high-protein diet, his insulin needs decrease quite a bit, so it's going to be especially important for you to monitor his blood glucose as you transition him to the new food.

Bella: Yeah! He may even go into remission like I did! Wouldn't that be cool?

Tara: Yes, it sure would. We hope this helps, Jessica. And like we said, be sure to work closely with your vet to ensure that your own sugar kitty stays healthy as you transition him.

Thomas: Best of luck to you, Jessica.

Bella: What about you other readers? Do you have diabetic cats? What do you feed them, and how did it affect your kitty's blood glucose level? Please share your stories to help Jessica.

(Paws and Effect)