



FROM THE ISFM DISCUSSION FORUM

CAT BODY CONDITION ASSESSMENT & WEIGHT LOSS NIGHTMARE

C&T NO. 5509

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Figure 1. Bagpuss

I'd appreciate some input on my own cat. 'Bagpuss' is approximately 5 years old (estimated – he was a stray) and is neutered. When I got him in May 2014 he weighed 5.2kg, but was covered in wounds and had just come into rescue. By November 2014 he weighed 5.8kg and I decided he was fat. I was guilty of feeding him rubbish (yeah, we shared croissants) so I shamefacedly put him on a diet.

He's on 100% wet food. He has 3 small cans daily. I have the calorie content of the food from the manufacturer and 3 cans is 180 kcal per day. I calculated that 80% of his resting energy requirement was 225 kcal, so he is getting less than that. And HONESTLY, I have been strict. DEAD strict. I don't want a diabetic cat. He has no extras any more, all his training treats are taken out of his cans (I pull the bits of meat out – gross) and nobody else is feeding him – hubby is well on board.

Bagpuss does steal food occasionally (from my plate!) but by occasionally I literally mean a morsel every couple of weeks or so. He goes outdoors once in a while, maybe once a week or so, his choice. He does get at least 30 minutes exercise a day because my husband adores the cat and is always playing with him. They run up and down the stairs like loons.

I weighed Bagpuss today, having been on his diet regime for nearly three months. His weight? 5.8kg! ARGH!

I would welcome non-biased and honest opinions about his

weight. I appreciate photos are more limited than a 'hands-on' examination, but I'm a bit worried about where to go from here. He is healthy in every other respect, apart from a minor eye issue (another story).

Pete Coleshaw: Shosh, forget the calorie count – what's the carb-count? The answer, as always, lies in your freezer at work!

Shoshannah McCarthy: I can try cutting him down to 2 tins daily. He'll die of hunger, lol! Pete – it's not raw, but it's not bad. >95% meat and no grains or veg.

Pete Coleshaw: Shosh, I'll let you off! I do find raw tends to satisfy hunger more – usually! I think the thing that ruins the theory is castration and the metabolic changes it induces. As you know, I am dead against routine castration of male dogs but of course it is different for smelly, fighting tom cats but neutering does mess up their metabolism. I would still go raw if I were you, on the basis that un-adulterated animal-based protein is more likely to induce satiety and a bit of bone can only help fill him up but unfortunately it doesn't work for all, at least short-term. Allow some time – as Zaila says, you've stopped any increases in weight, now work slowly on the decrease.

Shoshannah McCarthy: Pete, Bagpuss does love raw, but the reason I moved him onto the tins was because, rightly or wrongly, I thought it might be easier to modulate his intake more precisely. I'm not ruling it out again for the future, but I will stick with the tins for now and see if more time melts more weight. I will try cutting him down to 2 tins. I suspect the ear plugs and blindfold I must don in order to avoid his pitiful hunger cries may make keeping a cat slightly pointless, seeing as I will be unable to see or hear him!

Richard Malik (Feline Specialist): Replace one meal with a chicken drumstick. In fact, a drumstick once a day come close to a perfect diet. He will end up gnawing on the bone, and it gives him something to focus on if he is hungry. A lamb shank will do much the same – but that will definitely be enough for a day.

Shoshannah McCarthy: I will definitely try that. I used to give him chicken wings so hopefully he'll manage a drumstick. :)

Sam Taylor (Feline Specialist): Not trying to be controversial but don't those of you in the UK have concerns re raw chicken given the high proportion contaminated with *Campylobacter* (nearly 70% I think)? I am not keen on raw feeding for various reasons but would strongly advise against doing so for any house with older people or children.

What do you advise hygiene wise? I have visions of cats dragging *Campylobacter* covered meat all over people's houses.

Not trying to provoke a raw versus commercial cat food diet debate, more interested in that aspect as the contamination of chickens is such an issue in the UK.

Nikki Duckworth: Sam, it is in New Zealand also where if 1 chicken on the line that is contaminated then the next 10,000 are apparently.

Andrea Harvey (Feline Specialist): As a relatively recent convert to feeding part of the diet as raw meat, I can share my experiences:-

1. Healthy cats guts can cope very well with *Campylobacter* and *Salmonella* – what about wild cats and cats that hunt? Rare to have a problem. And they eat the intestines of rodents and birds, plus reptiles.
2. Important to feed it very fresh. Bacteria including *Campylobacter* proliferates quickly with time and so shouldn't feed anything not super fresh and high grade (either from a butcher where it has come in that day, or supermarket premium grade with longest shelf life). Don't get the 'reduced for a quick sale' packets!
3. Most cats won't touch it once there is significant bacterial load on the surface (i.e. too old) so this is also protective.
4. I don't feed raw meat to cats that have any intestinal disease as likely to be more susceptible to infectious agents, so I am careful and cautious with those.
5. In terms of how to feed and not get a disgusting house – because, yes, they would drag it all over the house if allowed half the chance! I recommend feeding them whilst they're locked in the bathroom or shower recess which is easily cleanable and prevents raw meat getting taken through the house. I imagine it would be trickier if there are kids in the household, for sure. I wouldn't worry about old/immunosuppressed though as just like preparing meat for themselves – as long as you wash hands after handling.

I used to be dead set against feeding raw too, but based on what I had been taught and common opinion, rather than experience; sort of like an anchoring phenomenon, like which religion you are brought up to accept. So I decided to keep an open mind and not be against something I never had experience with previously; rather, to try it first before making up my mind.

I have now been feeding my cats part raw meat for 5 years – never had a problem at all and I've noticed lots of health benefits. In fact, our cats more frequently get vomiting or diarrhoea when given commercial food (if they eat too much and/or too quickly, or after a sudden change of brands); hand-on-heart they have never had any GI upset from raw meat. I actively avoid pork – too fatty.

It is also commonplace in Australia to feed cats raw meat and at least 50% of my clients, if not more, feed some raw meat and I have honestly never come across a problem. It is, however, important to be careful; I only advise feeding fresh, high quality **human grade** meat and not the raw meat sold in pet shops, and nothing economy, just high grade! And I stick to chicken, beef and lamb.

Richard (Malik) has been feeding his cats like this for many years longer and, again, has never had a problem. He is also old(er) and immunosuppressed and he has never had a problem himself from this feeding practice – but has had severe food poisoning from eating out in restaurants – a much more likely source of problems for people.

We don't however have kids, and I do think it would be very tricky feeding cats raw meat with young children in the household, unless you can lock them out of the room used for feeding and clean it afterwards. I expect mums with young children have better things to do and I think it is wise to avoid the practice if you have young children.

I hope these experiences help. I would never in a million years thought I would have recommended feeding cats raw meat 10 years ago!

Richard Malik: If you worry about *Campy* – you cannot feed raw chicken. The way suppliers prepare the carcass there is contamination, and the number is closer to 100% than to 70%, the last time I checked. But cats have been eating the guts of birds since the dawn of time, and their microbiome usually prevents them being anything more than transient commensals.

Feed lamb instead. If you are worried about toxoplasmosis, freeze it first. Avoid kangaroo meat, especially pet food grade – risk of Q fever is an issue in breeding queens.

But in Australia I have at least 5 human infectious disease clinicians as friends who feed their cats and dogs raw chickens, or parts thereof. **They just wash their hands before eating meals.**

Sam – I have sad news for you. When your cat licks your face, frequently it's just cleaned its bum, which is why you get *Salmonella* and *E. coli* and the like as transient bacteria in cats' oral cavities.

I choose to let my cat lick my face. What about you? What about your kids?

**Melanie Dobromylsky
(Specialist Veterinary
Pathologist):**

Another UK raw chicken feeder – my cats eat raw chicken wings, and we have 2 young children in the house. Just be sensible about washing hands etc. We feed the cats in the evening, overnight – once the kids are in bed. We clear up the few remaining bones in the morning...

Never had any problems and have been raw feeding for about 11 years now. The cats love it!



Figure 2. Melanie and 'Ping'.

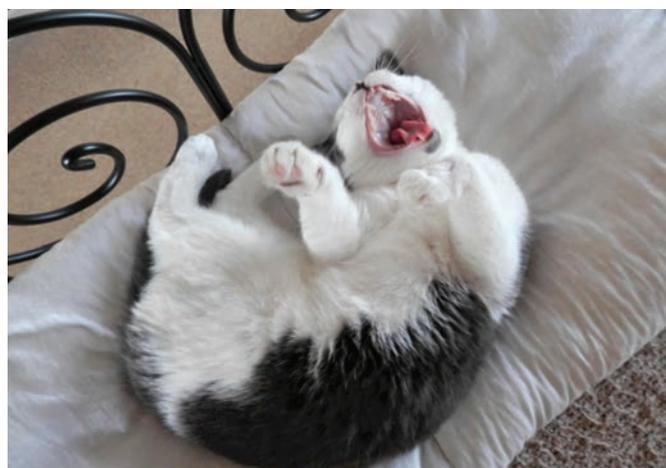


Figure 3. 'Ping'

**Carla Nienhuis (Registered Veterinary Nurse and ISFM
CertFN):**

I have the same (or sort of) problem with my cats. One is overweight (4.8 kg) and the other is 4 kg (that's OK!). We are going to renovate our scullery and we will create 2 eating houses with this kind of cat flap: www.sureflap.com/en-us/pet-doors/microchip-pet-door. At this moment we feed the cats at 6am, 11am, 4pm and 10pm. But my cats don't agree... they what to eat at 4 am as well! While we are sleeping... so I'll use the eating houses and SureFlaps to create an extra feeding moment. We will program the flap so the eating houses will be open around 4am. If we let it open all day, the overweight cat would start eating as soon as she could... that means immediately after her last meal :) The houses will be big enough for some feeding puzzles inside.

A friend of mine made cat houses to control her cat's eating habits. I'll ask her if I may show some of her pictures on this forum... And of course I'll show you my eating houses as soon as the renovation is ready.

Sam Taylor: I do want one of those SureFlap things but they cost £100 and I was thinking of my bank account, not my poor skinny cat. It is hard as 'Fatty' nicks her food (also sometimes vomits as she eats too quick) then she finds 'Eric'

and puts her bum in his face until he runs off, then she eats his food! If you shut him in he won't eat (likes to see all exits!) All ideas welcome as she is a walking pre-diabetic...

Zaila Dunbar: Aha, well Sam you need the SureFlap microchip activated cat feeders!

Sam Taylor: Thanks everyone for comments on raw feeding! Actually, we have a fat cat (too ashamed to post photo) and thin cat, very difficult to manage!

DE Participant: You've really cheered me up!

I felt guilty for feeding my mad kitty raw food, from the point of view of *Toxoplasma*, *Campylobacter*, etc. I've never worried about her catching disease from raw food, but I've been ticked off by other vets from the disease transmission point of view.

Mad kitty was hand-reared by me from 3 days old; my Rottweiler bitch did bum duties. She has all the behavioural problems of a hand-reared cat, vomits occasionally, gets idiopathic cystitis, bites, scratches, is rough in her affection – I suppose that's why I love her! I'm obviously a terrible mother.

But she does really well on raw food, she'll occasionally gobbles down her wet food, and then lavishly throw up. She never throws up raw food. I've never investigated her sporadic vomiting because: she's not losing weight; is healthy; I'm not brave/suicidal; and she's always done it sporadically, especially when anxious. I think investigation would be so traumatic, it's not worth it, and I presume it's behavioural.

Has anyone any views on emotional emesis in cats? I'm still not planning on investigation!

Pete Coleshaw: There is a slow-feed cat bowl available over here – the gobble-stop!

(Image sourced from the internet)



Figure 4. Gobble Stopper.

see if it works.

Richard Malik wrote: If you slow down the rate she eats wet food it will probably be fine. Feed in 2 sittings and smear about 40 grams all over a flat plate – this means they don't eat it too quickly. Some people think the high histamine content of wet food makes them vomit. TRY THIS TRICK –

Shoshannah McCarthy: Yes, that is what I meant, from a social stress point of view, giving them the option of eating alone. It is amazing how many cystitis patients' owners say they are not stressed but then when you start asking, it turns

out 3 cats share 1 bowl and 1 cat will block access to that or the cat flap.

Jane Ehrlich: Absolutely agree with Zaila. I've seen too many cases of inter-cat aggression where the owner has insisted on one large bowl for both cats. The problem was softened immeasurably when there were separate eating – and litterbox – stations.

Zaila Dunbar: I'm not sure what Nikki was referring to with 2 cats at the same bowl but I would advise against it from a behavioural/stress perspective. It's OK if they choose to eat from the same bowl, but they need to be given an option so not competing over resources. We see massive issues with stress related disease (FIC) and cats in households falling out with each other where we are, and many mixed sex neutered sibling pairs fall out significantly once they hit social maturity.

Andrea Harvey: Being a fellow veggie, I was also very repulsed about ripping up raw chicken initially (retch!), but once I got used to it, not a problem, and I'm careful re hygiene! I do think it would be a nightmare with kids though! You would find Leo sat in the bathroom gnawing on a drumstick! I think I would avoid that possibility!

I do sometimes get anxious advising clients though, as you know what clients are like listening to you; I had a half hour conversation with one client about what to feed and how, and what to avoid, and the next time I saw them, they said 'the cat is loving the pork tripe from the petshop'. Didn't you hear me say AVOID PORK, AVOID RAW PET SHOP MEAT?! I nearly died.

I think there is a big difference between just advocating raw diets in general, and doing it the way we now do - we are VERY careful. In fact, often Richard won't allow ME to buy the meat for HIS cats because he doesn't trust me to get the right brand/quality/date. I was in trouble last week for buying the wrong type of steaks! So feeding a raw diet yourself,

and recommending that to every client is also a different ballgame!

Sam Taylor: Thanks all – very interesting. I am not too worried about the cats – more the human health risks given the way chickens are killed and prepared (but then I have been veggie for nearly 30 years!).

Yes, 'Richard' my cat licks my children and, worse, I have a dog and my youngest child licks him as he thinks it is funny. He also shares food with him! One lick for dog, one for baby! Good for the immune system I hope! I take Andrea's point about fresh chicken and using a butcher. I think that must be important.

Pete do you advise caution if people have kids? Andrea suggests feeding in the shower. What about others? Just thinking practically.

Pete Coleshaw: Totally agree with Richard and Andrea on all points. I have sold maybe 20 tonnes of raw minced chicken – never had an issue – and I am certain that much, if not all, is contaminated with Campy of various species. The pH in the stomach of raw-fed carnivores drops much lower than those fed starchy diets and an animal fed an evolutionary diet should have optimal gut immunity, with a microbiome closer to natural. I suspect that a complement of good bugs blocks the bad bugs anyway – is raw the perfect prebiotic?

I would agree, though, that it is scary the first time you advocate it to a client, when everything you have been told is contrary. A bit like the bones sticking into their throat; how on earth have they evolved over the millenia to eat prey if this is an issue? If Campy really is a concern, then whole chicken pieces can be blanched in boiling water for a few seconds; it will kill the surface contaminants without denaturing the rest. I guess you could even do the same with minced meat-with-bone. ■

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Editor's note: Even specialists can have widely differing opinions about this and all manner of things. No one who knows who is right. But we all should have a view and be open to other people's experiences.

WINNER FOR BEST VIDEO IN THE ISSUE!

Thanks to Carla for not only taking these pictures for this C&T article, but also sending us a video as well for the eBook. Carla wins a DVD of her choice from www.vetbookshop.com

Post-script from Carla Nienhuis: I have just re-read my comment and I'm no longer completely behind it.

Earlier, I wrote that the cat flap will not be open all the time. It is not possible for the cat, however, to see if the cat flap is open or closed, with the result that the cat will not understand the way it works and will try to open it or refuse to use it. This may result in frustration. We have therefore chosen to let the cat flap stay open 24 hours (so we do not use the time function) and at night we put an automatic feeder in the eating houses. This feeder will open at 3am (the cat will hear a click and can see the valve is open, so it's clear she can eat).

Unfortunately, the eating houses are not big enough for feeding puzzles, so at least once a day we feed the cats with puzzles outside the eating houses. A friend of mine made houses which are big enough for feeding puzzles, but unfortunately I do not have those pictures to share.

Please see pictures of my eating houses.

Eating from a dish is very boring for cats... Let them work for their food!



Carla kindly went to the additional trouble of videoing the cat feeding houses in action. View in the eBook.

