High-protein, Low-carb 'Catkins' Diet Helps Cats with Diabetes

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

November 2004 News

While the jury is still out on the health effects of the popular Atkins diet in humans, a new study shows that diabetic cats may benefit from eating a high-protein "Catkins" diet.

With funding from Morris Animal Foundation, Drs. Deborah Greco and Mark Peterson, staff endocrinologists at The Animal Medical Center in New York have found that, in many cases, veterinarians and cat owners can help control a cat's diabetes with diet. Their results show that many diabetic cats on the "Catkins" diet no longer need to take insulin.

Dr. Greco says feline diabetes is similar to Type 2 diabetes in humans – and is related to being overweight. It occurs most often in obese male cats, and 45 percent of all cats between the ages of 8 and 12 are overweight or obese.

"The way to control the disease is to reduce the amount of body fat," she says.

Traditionally, diabetic cats are given a high-fiber diet to help them lose weight. The cats lose fat, but unfortunately, they also lose muscle. Once they go off the diet, the weight returns. Based on her results, Dr. Greco says a low-carb/high-protein diet is a better option. It helps the cats lose fat while still maintaining the muscle needed to keep the weight off permanently.

"It's the Atkins diet for cats," she says.

Feline patients at The Animal Medical Center and Colorado State University participated in the clinical trial. Of the cats on the high-protein diet, 68 percent went off insulin, while only 40 percent on the high-fiber diet went off insulin completely. Although both groups saw improvement, Dr. Greco firmly believes a high-protein diet is best because it is similar to what cats in the wild would eat.

She says in general, cats should not consume high-carbohydrate diets, which is what most dry foods offer. Canned diets provide more water in the food, she says, and pet owners can control the portions.

"The thing that convinced me that this was the right diet was the improved quality of life for these cats," Dr. Greco says. "They became kittens again."

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*