

## Uncover the Mystery Ingredients in Cat Food

**Cat foods come in a range of flavors, formulas and types. Learn how to decipher the labels and choose the right food for your cat.**

*By Lisa Kobs*

"Manufactured pet foods are formulated, processed and packaged to protect the nutritional content over the length of time a product is on the shelf," says Larry Hawley, manager of applied nutrition with Heinz Pet Products, Newport, Ky. Each serving must also give the required nutrition.

Consumers have the pet food industry to thank for keeping their cats healthy throughout the different stages of their lives. Through years of research, complete diets have been formulated to meet the needs of kittens, adult cats, elderly cats and those with specific dietary requirements.

There's no denying most cat owners love their pets and want the very best for them. In fact, many cats probably eat a more nutritionally balanced diet than we do. Cats are eating better than ever and living longer. According to the Pet Food Institute, U.S. cat owners spent more than 4.6 billion dollars on cat food in 1998, a figure that has quadrupled over the past 20 years.

### Processing Facts

Cat food is typically found in three forms: canned, dry and semimoist. While all three start with many of the same ingredients, they are processed in completely different ways.

**Canned:** "Canned food is made by a process called retorting and is not much more complex than home canning," says Daniel Carey, DVM, director of technical communications in research and development with The Iams Co., Dayton, Ohio.

The process begins with grinding meat into very small pieces and adding water to form a slurry. Dry ingredients, such as vitamins and minerals, are blended in and the mixture is pumped into the cans. Lids are applied and the cans are put into the retort, which is really a large pressure cooker. Cooking ranges from 50 to 90 minutes and temperature probes inside the can ensure the proper temperatures have been reached to kill all bacteria. Cans are then cooled and labeled."

The complexity with retorting lies in combining time and temperature. Cook the food too long and your cat won't want to eat it. If it is not cooked long enough, it will not be safe to eat, Dr. Carey says. Every food formula can have a different time/temperature safety combination, which is based on ingredients, how well the heat moves through the food and the size of the can.