

## 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*

"In one project we went through all different kinds of shapes: boxes, spheres, triangles, long skinny rods, and so forth," Dr. Carey says. "We found the cats preferred the spherical shape best. This same formula was made into three different-sized spheres that differed no more than 1/10 of an inch. The cats had a definite preference for the middle size. For this formula, that size and shape worked best, but that does not mean that every formula will be acceptable like that."

What then does your cat find appealing? "There is no overall generalized preference for one species flavor [i.e., chicken, beef, tuna] over another," Hawley says. "Individual cats have flavor preferences, but the cat population as a whole does not have a single preference to use as a rule of thumb."

Dr. Carey says that making cat food tasty for cats depends on the protein in the food.

"Cats like protein when it is chemically broken up into smaller protein molecules. This opens up portions that release different flavors the cats like. Cats also like slightly acid-tasting food," he says.

"If you take a piece of cat food and put it on the tip of your tongue, it will tingle. This is the acid that you are tasting."

Dispelling the Myths Some consumers remain skeptical of commercially processed pet foods for a variety of reasons. One myth is processing destroys the nutritional content of food. There is no denying some nutrients are damaged from processing. This is expected, and supplements are added to make up for the losses, according to Dr. Carey. Food is also nutritionally analyzed after processing to confirm the nutrients are at the right levels.

"Some nutrients are actually helped by the process," Dr. Carey says. "Carbohydrates are a good example. Cats cannot digest complex carbohydrates unless they are converted and broken down. They have to be ground up and then cooked just like what occurs in processing."

Another misconception about processed food is the ingredients on the label do not sound like quality foods to humans. Many consumers feel negatively toward ingredients such as by-products, Dr. Churchill says.