

## 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.**

*Lisa Kobs*

"We also observe that cats' food preferences can change over time. While cats like variety, they can be very sensitive to change. When you put a new food in front of them, and they reject it, they may be responding to the fact that it is different, not to whether it is good or bad food, he says.

"There are so many factors that influence why a cat may or may not like a food," Hawley says. "It really comes down to experimentation with your own cat. Food should not only nourish, but should provide joy to your pet. If a cat does not start to eat its food in the course of a few days, I recommend giving them another choice. But try that same food again in a month or two and don't be surprised if the second time the cat suddenly likes it. Remember, cats are not random about their food choices and they are always subject to reversal."

Who determines which flavor of seafood surprise is the most appealing or whether slices or shreds of beef are tastier in gravy? Some unfortunate lab technician? Luckily, no.

"At [Iams], we have a group of cats that spend their lives with us and have the daunting task of working 24 hours a day, and their job description includes eating, sleeping and using the litter box," Dr. Carey says. "Our feline food testers try out various new food formulas and give us their opinions."

The first test is the split preference test. "Two different bowls of food are passed underneath the cat's nose and then placed down for them to eat from. We watch to see which bowl the cat eats out of first. This first choice indicates a preference for aroma and possibly appearance. We measure how much the cat has eaten from both bowls during a mealtime of 30 minutes. The amount of food eaten may be different from the first bite preference. While the cat may like the smell of one food, after a few bites it may decide although it smells great, it has a funny taste or texture and they move on to the other food."

The second test is the acceptability test. "This measures whether or not a cat will eat enough of a certain food to maintain its body weight," Dr. Carey says. "They may really like the food, but may eat only half of the total calories needed. A final test actually tests the cat tasting ability. We put them through a series of tests to make sure that they are discriminating from two different bowls of food."

Cat food formulas go through months and months of development, testing and re-formation before they ever reach store shelves. Developing the ingredients is only the half of it. The next task is to find out what form the cats prefer to eat.