

Tips to Avoid Tainted Cat Foods

A veterinary specialist gives advice on how to avoid tainted cat foods.

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During the recent ongoing pet food recall, many pet owners are worried and confused about what to feed their cats. Toxicologists are still investigating how the food became contaminated and with what.

"The dilemma is targeting the exact ingredient and the source, so that we can determine which products are safe and which ones are not," said Sonja Olson, DVM, of Florida Veterinary Specialists & Cancer Treatment Center in Tampa, Fla.

So, while scientists work to pinpoint the problems, what should pet owners feed their cats? Olson offers some tips on how to avoid tainted cat foods:

Stick with the dry cat foods, because fewer of them have been recalled, she said. Pay attention to the labels on all these cat foods and consider selecting a type of food without wheat gluten. Many semi-moist and canned foods contain wheat gluten, while most dry cat foods do not.

Consider your cat's lifestyle and medical issues. Pay attention to ingredients on each bag of food. Note the amount of sodium because high sodium levels are harmful to cats with heart or kidney problems. Look at the percentage of protein versus carbohydrates for diabetic cats that need a higher protein-to-carbohydrate ratio.

Be aware of what is in cat food treats and apply the same principal to the treats as to the food.

Home cooking is another option. You can find pet food cookbooks online or at bookstores. Cats are very sensitive to having a vitamin D deficiency and might need vitamins and supplements to make sure their home-cooked meals are complete.

Prescription diets have tighter guidelines and more controls on their ingredients than other pet food. They are still considered safe. As of now, one prescription diet has voluntarily been recalled as a precaution, while experts determine if the product's wheat gluten, which contains melamine, is contributing to the problem.

Natural foods are not necessarily better than other ones. People should pay attention to every bag of food they purchase.

Talk with your veterinarian, rather than the salespeople at the food store. Your veterinarian knows your pet's history and lifestyle and will be up to date with the latest on the recall and the ingredients of concern.

"This is a huge wake up call to the pet food industry, to veterinarians and to pet owners. The problem can only make us better," Olson said.