

Home Cooking for Cats

Get tips on how to responsibly prepare homemade diets for cats.

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With the ongoing investigation of the Menu Foods pet food recall, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) and numerous other organizations have received inquiries from concerned pet owners regarding the safety of homemade diets for their cats.

While these questions are natural, toxicologists and veterinarians urge pet owners to fully research homemade diets for cats before putting on the chef's hat.

The ASPCA still generally recommends high-quality commercial diets for cats because such foods are highly researched and are formulated with nutrients, said ASPCA Senior Vice President Steven Hansen, a board-certified veterinary toxicologist.

"Homemade diets can certainly provide pets with an adequate diet, but they do require a substantial amount of work and guidance by your veterinary team to ensure that the final product includes a complete nutritional balance," said Hansen, who manages the ASPCA's animal poison control center.

"This is especially important if you plan to give your pet vegetarian or vegan food — some fruits and vegetables, in certain doses and circumstances, can be extremely harmful to pets," he said.

For example, onions, garlic, chives, avocado, grapes, raisins, and macadamia nuts all can cause illness when eaten by cats. Raw foods are not recommended because they might lead to salmonella poisoning.

"Ask your veterinarian to refer you to a specialist with an advanced degree in animal nutrition. These certified veterinary nutritionists will be able to formulate a balanced recipe for your pet, which will give you peace of mind as well," Louise Murray, director of medicine at the ASPCA's Bergh Memorial Animal Hospital said.

If a homemade cat food recipe is used, remember the following:

Follow recipe directions exactly. Do not use substitutions or omit ingredients. This includes processing and cooking instructions because some processing steps can destroy or damage the nutrients in the ingredients.

Have your cat examined by a veterinarian at least twice a year, so that its health can be evaluated.

Supplementing your cat's diet with healthy treats is fine, but treats, even healthy ones, should not make up more than five to 10 percent of cats' daily caloric intake. Too many treats can throw off the balance of nutrients cats receive from their diets.