

Points on Pets: Most pet foods have enough nutrients

by R.G._Elmor_DVM

Q: Although you have stated many times in your column that if a cat owner feeds a high quality commercially prepared diet that is labeled as complete, additional nutrients are not needed. However, my wife still insists on giving our cat additional vitamins and supplements. I, of course, look at this as an unnecessary expense. This is not insignificant since we are on a fixed income. Our cat is healthy and has been vaccinated for everything possible. I sometimes worry that our cat is more important to my wife than I am.

A: Of course without knowing much more, it is impossible to tell you whether or not the additional vitamins and supplements that your wife feeds your cat are helpful, harmful, or just not needed. Your local veterinarian can best evaluate your cat's total diet and advise you regarding feeding anything other than the complete diet you are purchasing for it.

It is true that most cats being fed commercially prepared balanced diets do not need supplements including additional vitamins. Commercially prepared cat foods labeled as "complete," "balanced," "perfect" or "scientific," should contain all of the nutrients required in a balanced formulation for your healthy cat. Unless your cat has a specific diagnosed ailment, you should not have to feed it a supplement or give it additional vitamins. In some situations, overfeeding supplements can be harmful. Excessive calcium, phosphorous and vitamin D can cause abnormal growth in kittens. Feeding too much vitamin D can cause deposition of calcium in the lungs, heart and blood vessels. Excessive vitamin A can cause swollen painful joints, slow bone growth, sterility, and loss of hair.

Large commercial pet food companies have large budgets for developing their products. These companies also go to great lengths to make sure that their products are safe and consistent. In most situations, the quality of commercially made pet food products far exceeds what most cat owners can make routinely in their homes. You and your wife should ask your veterinarian for his or her advice regarding the best dietary plan for your cat.

Q: Unfortunately, our snake has had several episodes of mouth rot during the last several months. Although our treatments have seemingly been effective, they have only been temporary. Are there any long-term cures for this problem?

A: Mouth rot or ulcerative stomatitis in snakes and lizards due to bacterial infections is a fairly common problem. The predisposing causes usually include malnutrition, suboptimal environmental temperatures and injuries.

The tissue around the teeth of reptiles with mouth rot is usually swollen. Ulcers oozing pus are often seen on the mucous membranes in the mouth. These infections can lead to infections involving the jawbones.

The treatment of mouth rot usually includes thoroughly cleaning the mouth, administration of antibiotics, and forced feeding if the animal refuses to eat. Of course you should have your snake examined by your veterinarian. If your veterinarian does not treat reptiles, he or she can refer you to a veterinary specialist who treats exotic pets.

Send an e-mail or write to Pets, P.O. Box 120190, San Diego, CA 92112-0190. Only questions of general interest will be answered in this column.

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