

# ***Little Big Cat***

**Dr. Jean Hofve**

*info@littlebigcat.com*

## **DIET: THE PROTEIN CONTROVERSY**

(extracted from full article entitled [Kidney Disease in Older Cats](#))

**By Jean Hofve, DVM**

You may have heard that restricting protein is recommended for cats in kidney failure. Although this has been the "standard" treatment for decades, as far as cats are concerned, it has always been--and remains--very controversial. According to experts at Colorado State University's veterinary teaching hospital, restricted protein *does not prevent kidney failure* in a healthy cat, and has *no effect* on the ultimate progression of renal disease. Research also shows that even very high protein diets do not make renal failure worse in cats (although high protein does worsen the disease in dogs and humans). (One pet food maker recently completed a study it claims shows that its restricted-protein diet increases lifespan in CRF cats. However, because the study has not yet been published, it is impossible to evaluate the data, which is contradicted by other research.) The real culprit is actually phosphorus, which meat contains in large amounts. The only way to restrict phosphorus is to restrict protein. Decreasing phosphorus intake (by restricting protein) can help some cats feel better, so it may be worth a try in a symptomatic cat.

However, some studies have suggested that excessive restriction of protein may actually cause further damage to the kidneys and other organs, because there is not enough protein for normal body maintenance and repair. *Experts say that these diets are not appropriate until the BUN (Blood Urea Nitrogen) is at least double what it should be normally (about 60-80 mg/dl).*

Furthermore, there is one big problem with using the protein-restricted commercial diets: many cats don't like them, and won't eat them. Obviously, it does little good to provide a special diet if the cat is going to starve to death! Experts emphasize that it is much more important to feed the cat what he likes and will eat, and maintain weight and body condition, than to be overly concerned about protein content. (Please note that if you add any other protein source to the diet, it will completely negate any possible beneficial effect from the low-phosphorus renal diet. It is useless to feed both a renal diet and a normal protein food or meat-based treats at the same time.)

Let me say this again, because it is the single most important thing to know about CRF: feed the cat anything she will eat! IF THE CAT WON'T EAT IT, IT WON'T HELP THE CAT! Weight loss is your cat's worst enemy in this disease; so let the cat eat what she wants!

Because water balance is so crucial, it is best to feed a high-moisture diet to help keep the cat hydrated; do not feed only dry food. Feeding mostly or only canned food, even though it is high in phosphorus and protein, provides the moisture and calories that these cats need, in a very palatable form that most cats will happily eat. You can also get low-phosphorus renal diets in canned form. Dry cat food causes dehydration even in healthy cats, and is not appropriate for CRF cats (unless, of course, it's the only food he will eat!).

The best thing you can do is feed a home-prepared diet; but only if the cat will eat it! If the cat has never eaten homemade food, or does not have a hearty appetite, this is not a good time to make this switch! There are several good books on home cooking for animals, such as *Dr. Pitcairn's Guide to Natural Health for Dogs and Cats*, by Richard Pitcairn, DVM, and Susan Pitcairn. (Rodale Press. ISBN 075962432.) They discuss why a diet made from fresh, raw foods is important, and provide recipes, including a special recipe specifically designed for animals with kidney disease. Another excellent book is *Home-Prepared Dog and Cat Diets: the Healthful Alternative* by Donald R. Strombeck, DVM. (Iowa State

University Press. ISBN 0813821495.) If you choose to use Dr. Strombeck's recipes, I suggest substituting 1 capsule of taurine (250 mg) for the canned clams, since clams do not contain enough taurine for proper maintenance. For an easy starter diet, click [here](#).

### **Special Nutrition**

Several nutritional supplements may be helpful for cats with kidney disease. Omega-3 fatty acids have been shown to be beneficial in CRF. Antioxidants are also important. Both of these are contained in the highly digestible algae, [BioSuperfood](#). (For detailed product information and Frequently Asked Questions, please visit [Optimum Choices](#).)

A nutritional supplement called "Renafood" from Standard Process, is a very good renal detoxifier and helps to maximize kidney function in cats. Give one or two a day. Most cats eat them readily if they are crushed into the food. Call Standard Process at 1-800-558-8740 to find a distributor in your area. Renafood is a *human* product, which in my experience works much better than their cat product Feline Renal Support, so be sure to insist on Renafood.

Remember, though, that the basic diet is the most important factor in your cat's health, and no supplement will make up for poor quality nutrition. For more info on feeding, choosing a good food, and switching to a better diet, see the many nutrition articles in our [Library](#).

Newly published research shows a benefit from probiotics (friendly bacteria) in cats with CRF. Kidney blood values (BUN and creatinine) decreased significantly when cats were given a probiotic product in canned food. The specific product tested was made by [Kibow Biotech](#) (610-353-5130), email [info@kibowbiotech.com](mailto:info@kibowbiotech.com).

Little Big Cat provides telephone consultations for cat behavior and health problems. For more information, go to [www.LittleBigCat.com](http://www.LittleBigCat.com).

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