



For Pete's Sake Natural Nutrition for Pets

from the people who know pet food



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Pottenger's Cats — A Study in Nutrition by Francis M. Pottenger, Jr., MD

Between the years of 1932 and 1942, Dr. Francis Marion Pottenger, Jr. conducted a feeding experiment to determine the effects of heat-processed food on cats. His ten-year cat study was prompted by the high rate of mortality he was experiencing among his laboratory cats undergoing adrenalectomies for use in standardizing the hormone content of the adrenal extract he was making. Because there were no existent chemical procedures for standardizing biological extracts, manufacturers of such extracts necessarily had to use animals to determine their potency. As cats die without their adrenal glands, the dose of extract required to support their lives calibrated the level of the extract's potency.

In his effort to maximize the preoperative health of his laboratory animals, Francis fed them a diet of market grade raw milk, cod liver oil and cooked meat scraps from the sanitarium. These scraps included the liver, tripe, sweetbreads, brains, heart and muscle. This diet was considered to be rich in all the important nutritive substances by the experts of the day, and the surgical technique used for the adrenalectomies was the most exacting known. Therefore, Francis was perplexed as to why his cats were poor operative risks. In seeking an explanation, he began noticing that the cats showed signs of deficiency. All showed a decrease in their reproductive capacity and many of the kittens born in the laboratory had skeletal deformities and organ malfunctions.

As his neighbors in Monrovia kept donating an increasing number of cats to his laboratory, the demand for cooked meat scraps exceeded supply and he placed an order at the local meat packing plant for raw meat scraps, again including the viscera, muscle and bone. These raw meat scraps were fed to a segregated

group of cats each day and within a few months this group appeared in better health than the animals being fed cooked meat scraps. Their kittens appeared more vigorous, and most interestingly, their operative mortality decreased markedly.

The contrast in the apparent health of the cats fed raw meat and those fed cooked meat was so startling, it prompted Francis to undertake a controlled experiment. What he had observed by chance, he wanted to repeat by design. He wanted to find answers to such questions as: Why did the cats eating raw meat survive their operations more readily than those eating cooked meat? Why did the kittens of the raw meat fed cats appear more vigorous? Why did a diet based on cooked meat scraps apparently fail to provide the necessary nutritional elements for good health? He felt the findings of a controlled feeding experiment might illuminate new facts about optimal human nutrition.

The Cat Study of Francis M. Pottenger, Jr., MD is unique. There is no similar experiment in the medical literature. The pathological and chemical findings were supervised by Francis in consultation with Alvin G. Foord, M.D., professor of pathology at the University of Southern California and pathologist at the Huntington Memorial Hospital in Pasadena. Accordingly, the studies met the most rigorous scientific standards of the day and their protocol was observed consistently.

Since The Cat Study is unique, its findings are frequently quoted and misquoted in order to justify the ideas of others. For example, one author of a popular selling book states that 200 cats died of arthritis; this indeed did not happen. Another author states that the

cats were fed sprouts and survived in full health for four continuous generations. Again, no such experiment took place, and yet this misinformation has been traced over a dozen or more different articles and books.

A frequent criticism of The Pottenger Cat Study is that it was not properly controlled. Here it is necessary to ask, "By what standards?" Every one of the studies followed strictly defined protocol. All variables in the stock of the animals were reported and explained. Because some of the test procedures may seem crude forty years later, this in no way invalidates the facts that the procedures were meticulously controlled and that the results of the experiments were reported as observed.

Another criticism is that the cats were kept in an artificial environment unrelated to real living conditions. Such a criticism overlooks the experimental necessity of maintaining a controlled environment to provide valid findings. It also overlooks the evidence that given specific living conditions, specific changes repeatedly occurred in the health of the cats under observation.

Another frequent criticism is that the experimental work done on cat nutrition has no appropriate application to human nutrition. Francis M. Pottenger, Jr., MD never stated that a one-to-one comparison could be made between his findings in cat nutrition and his findings in human nutrition. He did say: "While no attempt will be made to correlate the changes in the animals studied with malformations found in humans, the similarity is so obvious that parallel pictures will suggest themselves."

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