

# Feeding Practices of Dog and Cat Owners Reflect Attitudes Toward Pet Foods

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## Abstract:

The PET DINER study was a telephone survey conducted to better understand why pet owners make certain nutritional decisions for their pets. Both dog and cat owners were included, which allowed us to differentiate the way people feed pet cats vs. pet dogs and how that might reflect owners' attitudes about pet foods. Prospective survey respondents were selected from local telephone books using a randomized process. A total of 18,194 calls were made from the five study sites between May and August, 2004. 1074 people (6%) representing 619 dogs and 455 cats completed the survey. Detailed information about feeding practices was collected. Pet owners' perceptions were assessed based on agreement/disagreement with statements regarding pet foods and the pet food industry. The Mann-Whitney Rank Sum test was used to detect differences between dog and cat owners and the Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance on ranks was used to evaluate differences among pet owners based on both type of pet and feeding practices ( $\geq 75\%$  commercial vs.  $\geq 50\%$  home-prepared diets). More cats than dogs ate commercial pet food as  $\geq 75\%$  of their main diet (96% vs. 87%, respectively;  $p < 0.001$ ), and more dogs than cats ate a home-prepared food as  $\geq 50\%$  of their main diet (6% vs. 3%, respectively;  $p < 0.009$ ). For five of the statements, a difference in the attitudes of cat vs. dog owners was detected ( $p < 0.05$ ). In general, this reflected more positive attitudes regarding commercial foods and less positive attitudes regarding home-prepared foods on the part of cat vs. dog owners. Analysis based on both type of pet and feeding practices identified significant differences among groups for 18/26 statements. However, when the Dunn's Method for pairwise multiple comparisons was applied, significant differences were due to feeding practices rather than type of pet for 17/18 statements. Only differences in attitudes about the statement 'raw bones can be safely fed to pets' remained significant for cat vs. dog owners feeding commercial foods. In conclusion, more cat owners than dog owners feed  $\geq 75\%$  commercial foods to their pets and this is reflected in different attitudes about the nutritional soundness of commercial pet foods.

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