

Abstract

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Evaluation of cats fed vegetarian diets and attitudes of their caregivers

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Objective—To determine motivation and feeding practices of people who feed their cats vegetarian diets as well as taurine and cobalamin status of cats consuming vegetarian diets.

Design—Cross-sectional study.

Animals—34 cats that had been exclusively fed a commercial or homemade vegetarian diet and 52 cats that had been fed a conventional diet for ≥ 1 year.

Procedures—Participants were recruited through a Web site and from attendees of a national animal welfare conference. Caregivers of cats in both groups answered a telephone questionnaire regarding feeding practices for their cats. Blood was obtained from a subset of cats that had been fed vegetarian diets. Blood and plasma taurine and serum cobalamin concentrations were measured.

Results—People who fed vegetarian diets to their cats did so largely for ethical considerations and were more likely than people who fed conventional diets to believe that there are health benefits associated with a vegetarian diet and that conventional commercial cat foods are unwholesome. Both groups were aware of the potential health problems that could arise from improperly formulated vegetarian diets. All cats evaluated had serum cobalamin concentrations within reference range, and 14 of 17 had blood taurine concentrations within reference range.

Conclusions and Clinical Relevance—Vegetarian diets are fed to cats primarily for ethical considerations. Results of this study should aid practitioners in communicating with and providing advice to such clients.