



The Savvy Cat Owner's Guide: Nutrition on the Internet

More than 75% of all American homes have computers and this is both a blessing and a curse. For cat owners, the internet provides vast amounts of information on many subjects. The information, however, is virtually unregulated and its quality ranges from excellent to pure quackery.

Feline nutrition is a popular topic. There are literally thousands of websites, promoting everything from recipes for raw food and vegetarian diets; advertisements for supplements and holistic foods; recommendations for diets that allegedly prevent or cure disease; 'get-rich quick' pyramid-selling schemes for nutritional supplements and consultation services operated by 'nutritionists.' Many home-made diets are promoted - some which are almost nutritionally balanced; some that are mildly unbalanced and

All in all, many nutritional myths are perpetuated, many half-truths reinforced and many incorrect facts conveyed. There is, of course, some excellent information - but not nearly as

Surfing Tips

So how can you decide what to believe? Here are some recommendations to help you when evaluating the content of websites:

Discuss information with your veterinarian. What you read online should enhance what your vet tells you, not replace it. If in doubt, ask him or her to help you evaluate it.

Research the credentials of the site's author. Is it a pet owner; a company; a veterinarian; a PhD in animal

careful when a person marketing his or her services claims

is no standardization in training for this. The exception is a

College of Veterinary Nutrition (ACVN) or the European College of Veterinary Comparative Nutrition (ECVCN). These are veterinarians who have undergone several years of rigorous post-graduate nutrition training in approved residency programs and who have passed the ACVN or ECVCN's certifying examination.

Read the website address. Sites with an address ending in .com are commercial. Those ending in .edu are educational

pet food companies often have high-quality websites with good general nutrition information that is separate from their product information.

Check the source of the information. Do the authors simply state that a product 'prevents cancer' or is there

It is easy - though illegal - to make unproven claims for nutritional products but it is much harder to back them up

from the author's own article or promotional literature or is it from a peer-reviewed veterinary journal? Most products on the internet do not cite studies to back up their claims. Those that do often cite studies on humans, rats, or dogs which may not be pertinent to cats.

Check the timeliness of the information. Things change

of nutrition. Many websites are out of date. What was recommended two years ago may not be accepted practice today. A good website will be updated frequently.

Be wary of anecdotal information. Descriptions of one person's experience (e.g. 'When my cat was diagnosed

supplement and now she's cured') can be misleading. While it can be useful to hear about other people's experiences, their positive evaluations do not mean that

discuss what you've heard with your veterinarian.

Watch out for rating websites. Most websites that rank cat foods do so either on opinion or on criteria that do not necessarily ensure a good quality food (e.g. price, ingredients, size of the company). It's important to use more objective criteria (science, quality control) in judging a cat food.

Be skeptical of grand claims or easy answers to difficult problems.

to be true, it probably is.

If you are a critical web surfer and work with your veterinarian

of the computer age without experiencing its problems.

Below are the web addresses of some useful, accurate sources of information on nutrition:

Nutrition Guidelines

<http://www.wsava.org/educational/global-nutrition-committee>

<https://www.aahanet.org/Library/NutritionalAsmt.aspx>

Tools for the Veterinary Healthcare Team

<http://wsava.org/nutrition-toolkit>

<http://www.petnutritionalliance.org>

Pet Nutrition – General Information for Pet Owners

<http://dels-old.nas.edu/banr/petdoor.html>

Pet Food

about pet food <http://petfood.aafco.org/>
www.tufts.edu/vet/nutrition/faq/general_pet_nutrition.html

reporting portal <http://www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/Products/AnimalFoodFeeds/PetFood/default.htm>

<http://www.petfoodinstitute.org/Index.cfm?Page=Consumers>
www.petfoodreport.com

Nutrition Consultations

conduct nutritional consultations for veterinarians and/or pet owners www.acvn.org

nutritionists in Europe www.esvcn.com

Home-cooked Diets

nutritionally balanced homemade diet recipes for veterinarians and/or pet owners www.acvn.org

with healthy pets. Veterinarians can customize pre-formulated recipes for animals with medical conditions
www.balanceit.com

www.esvcn.com

Obesity

loss tools www.petobesityprevention.com

Dietary Supplements

(primarily for human supplements but some pet supplements are included) www.consumerlab.com

<http://www.fda.gov/food/DietarySupplements/default.htm>

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/drug-information/DrugHerbIndex>

safety notices, internet health info <http://ods.od.nih.gov>

and nutrition information, links to a variety of dietary supplement websites
http://fnic.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?info_center=4&tax_level=1&tax_subject=274

(human supplements only) <http://www.usp.org/usp-verification-services/usp-verified-dietary-supplements>

Raw meat diets

http://www.tufts.edu/vet/nutrition/resources/raw_meat_diets.pdf

<http://www.fda.gov/downloads/AnimalVeterinary/GuidanceComplianceEnforcement/GuidanceforIndustry/UCM052662.pdf>

Other

<http://indoorpet.osu.edu/>

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/search>

