



# HOW TO TRANSITION CATS TO RAW FROZEN, FREEZE-DRIED AND DEHYDRATED FOODS

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## THE ISSUE

Transitioning cats to raw frozen, dehydrated and freeze-dried foods can be challenging. It's probably much easier to continue feeding your cat whatever it's currently eating. So why do cat owners take on the challenge of transitioning cats to a less processed diet that's richer in meat? Because cats are among the most carnivorous species on earth and these diets are much closer to their ancestral diet than anything else. Owners who succeed at transitioning to these foods frequently observe dramatic changes in their cats within weeks: shinier, healthier coats with less shedding, more energy, eagerness at mealtime, healthier weights and smaller stools with less odor. A combination of hard science and anecdotal evidence leads us to believe that cats who eat these diets will tend to live longer, healthier lives with reduced chances for developing diabetes, inflamed bladders, urinary tract obstructions, urinary crystals and kidney or bladder stones.

Because our bodies are used to variety in our diets we transition from one meal to the next without much thought. But our cats often have far less variety in their diets and transitioning from one food to another can create upsets. Especially if your cat has been eating the same thing for a long time, its body is in balance with its current diet, and it will take time for her to achieve a new balance with a new diet. Transitioning her gradually reduces the disruption of the intestinal bacteria and the irritation of the digestive tissues that frequently result from rapid diet changes.

## WHEN TO CONTACT YOUR VETERINARIAN

If your cat refuses to eat for more than 36 hours, contact your veterinarian. Extended fasting can lead to hepatic lipidosis (fatty liver disease), a serious and potentially life-threatening condition. If the diet transition leads to vomiting that continues for 24 hours after you stop feeding or begins again after you reintroduce food, contact your veterinarian.

## THE SOLUTION

Please read Mud Bay's *How to Feed Your Cat Frozen Raw Food* or *How To Feed Your Cat Freeze-dried and Dehydrated Raw Food* before starting a raw diet. These solution sheets cover aspects of feeding raw diets that aren't covered in this discussion of transitioning.

A gradual transition to a healthy diet seldom leads to health concerns, but if your cat refuses to eat or develops vomiting, diarrhea, excess gas or constipation, you may be transitioning her too quickly. If this happens, stop the transition and withhold food for 24 hours. After 24 hours, begin feeding frequent, small meals of her original diet. If all symptoms cease and she appears to be back to normal, you can re-start the transition a few days later, but with a more gradual approach. If the transition leads to vomiting that continues for 24 hours, contact your veterinarian.

### **1 Transition your cat to a wet diet**

If your cat is currently eating an entirely wet diet, skip this step. If your cat is eating a mix of kibble and wet food, take a week to gradually reduce the amount of kibble and increase the amount of wet food. After a month of nothing but wet food, move to step 2. If your cat is currently eating nothing but kibble, ask us for *How to transition cats to wet foods*. Start by fully transitioning your cat from kibble to wet food. Then, after a month on wet food, move to step 2.

### **2 Gradually transition to a raw diet**

- **The transition should take at least two weeks.** This is a longer transition than when changing between two cooked foods (like kibble and wet) because raw is a very different form that requires greater adaptation.

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Mud Bay and its staff strive to help dog and cat owners improve the health of their animals and to increase the happiness owners experience in caring for their animals by providing natural foods, well-made supplies and useful information. Mud Bay and its staff do not diagnose or treat specific conditions, and the information provided by Mud Bay's staff, publications, website and other media are not substitutes for treatment by a veterinarian. A great vet is an invaluable resource, and we recommend that owners discuss diet and other changes in the care of their animals with theirs.

- **Warm** the frozen raw diet or rehydrate the freeze-dried or dehydrated diet to the temperature of a live mouse (about 100° F). Put frozen food into a Ziploc bag and immerse it in warm water. Rehydrate freeze-dried and dehydrated diets with warm water. Don't microwave. (This makes raw food less healthy and less palatable.)
- **Start by putting raw and wet food next to each other** in a bowl or on a plate. Use the proportions outlined below. If your cat doesn't eat the raw diet, try stirring raw and wet together.

Transition Schedule

	Day 1 - 5	Day 5 - 9	Day 9 - 13	Day 14
WET DIET	75%	50%	25%	
RAW DIET	25%	50%	75%	100%

- **Transitioning to a diet that's higher in fat takes longer.** If the fat level of the new diet is more than three percentage points higher (based on dry matter) than the fat level of your cat's current diet, your cat's pancreas will need much longer to increase its production of enzymes and enable your cat to safely make the transition. Double (or triple) the length of each stage in the transition schedule above.

### **3 Support your cat's digestive health through the transition**

For many cats, a gradual approach is sufficient to successfully transition to a raw diet. But some cats require—and most cats will benefit from—supplementation to strengthen digestive health during the transition.

- **Supplement with prebiotics (a few days before starting the transition, if possible).** Prebiotics feed the good bacteria already in your cat's digestive tract. Prebiotics include fructooligosaccharides (FOS), inulin, oligofructose, chicory root, dandelion, burdock, wild yam, jicama, agave, and garlic.
- **Supplement with digestive enzymes.** Digestive enzyme supplements help the body digest food and are especially helpful to reduce the work load on the pancreas. Look for products with protease, amylase, cellulase or lipase.

**4 If your cat balks, slow things down** Instead of two weeks, stretch it out longer—much longer if necessary. Below are two additional techniques that work for some cats. Be patient and use your imagination—and if you come up a technique that works especially well, let us know so we can share it with other cat owners (send us an email at info@mudbay.com).

- **The super slow-plus-decoy approach.** Place a small portion of raw diet on the same plate and next to your cat's old food for a week. Next, continue putting a small portion of raw on the side, but also mix 5% of the amount of raw recommended for a cat her size together with your cat's old food (decrease the amount of old food proportionately). After your cat has been eating this for a week, add 5% more raw and decrease the old food proportionately. Continue with weekly adjustments until the transition is complete.
- **Add a topper.** Try putting a tasty, smelly topper on top of the wet-raw mixture. You can try one of the many feline toppers available or freeze-dried food.

### **RESULTS**

If you don't succeed the first time, stop, take a break, let your cat regain balance with her diet, support your cat's digestive system with supplements and then try again more gradually. For information about helping a cat with an upset stomach, read Mud Bay's *How to Calm a Cat's Stomach*. Transitioning to less processed, meat-rich diets is worth the effort, but if you ultimately don't succeed, don't stress. There are millions of healthy cats living long, happy lives eating kibble or cans. Find a combination of healthy, natural kibble and canned cat food that meets your cat's needs, provide digestive support, give her lots of love and attention and enjoy life with your cat.

### **STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?**

Mud Bay staffers are specifically trained to help owners transition their cats to raw frozen, dehydrated and freeze-dried foods. Muddies can also help you find the products that match the recommendations on this sheet, so if you need more help or information, please let us know.

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