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### **Don't cats need a dietary source of Taurine?**

Yes- and the vegan cat foods we carry contain adequate amounts. Although Taurine naturally occurs only in animal tissue, synthetic Taurine has been produced on a large scale since about 1930. In fact, many meat-based pet foods utilize synthetic Taurine to meet nutritional requirements as well (most naturally-occurring Taurine is washed away during the rendering process)!

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### **I am vegan, but I feel it is wrong to force my own morality onto my cats and dogs.**

Is it really more wrong to ask your cat or dog to eat a healthy vegetarian diet than it is to subject countless cows, chickens and pigs to the brutal torture of the factory farm?

When you purchase slaughterhouse products, you are increasing the profitability of animal slaughter by contributing directly to the consumer demand for its products. In so doing, you are undermining the goals of the pro-animal movement and contributing to animal cruelty in a way that is equally as direct and meaningful as if you were buying hamburgers.

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### **Isn't meat their natural diet?**

Dogs and cats live in the uniquely *unnatural* environment of our homes. While "in nature" they would hunt, food now magically appears twice daily in their bowls. They are given medicine to cure illnesses, and are surgically sterilized to control their reproduction. Why insist that their diet alone remain "natural"- especially when it must come at the expense of other animals' lives?

### **What's Really in Meat-Based Pet Food:**

- Carcasses of euthanized cats & dogs (some with flea collars and containing sodium pentobarbital used for euthasia).
- Unwanted insecticides and pharmaceuticals from diseased livestock (complete with plastic ID tags).
- Rotting supermarket rejects including plastic and styrofoam packaging.
- Animal parts deemed "unfit for human consumption" (heads, legs, tongues, intestines, esophagi, beaks, feathers, bones, blood, lungs, ligaments, etc.)

- Diseased and cancerous body parts from the 4 D's: dead, dying, diseased, & disabled factory-farmed animals

Is it possible to argue that any of these are the "natural" diet of your cats and dogs?

What is "natural" has never been the basis for what is ethical anyway. Rape is a perfectly "natural" reproductive strategy, utilized by many species, yet few would argue that this makes it okay. Morality is based on a vision of what ought to be, not on a dogmatic adherence to whatever has historically been.

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### **Are there any health risks associated with a vegetarian diet in cats and dogs?**

The digestive system of dogs is well-designed to handle vegetable matter; like humans, they evolved as omnivores and can utilize a wide variety of nutrient sources. Although most dogs do not appear to have a need for Taurine in their diet, some do suffer from serious health problems when this nutrient is lacking; as a precaution it is generally recommended that they be given a supplement if their food does not already contain it ([Evolution](#) and [VegeDog](#) both contain Taurine).

Cats, on the other hand, are true carnivores; switching them to a vegan diet, while usually possible, can sometimes be a little bit more difficult. [Vegecat](#) and [Evolution](#) are both designed to be nutritionally complete and most cats do fine on them- many are even reported to have increased general health (energy level, coat appearance, etc.). However, some vegetarian cats are also reported to have a higher incidence of urinary tract problems (crystals, inflammation, etc.)- this is due to the fact that most vegetable protein is less acidic than meat protein. We carry a few products designed to minimize this risk ([Enzymes pH](#), [Tinkle Tonic](#), & [Vegecat pH](#)) and making sure to give some wet food along with dry (or wetting kibble before serving) may also help. Your vet can recommend a stronger acidifier (such as [Methionine](#)) to deal with chronic cases. See [next question](#) for further info.

It is important, whether your cat or dog is vegan or not, to be a responsible guardian and to monitor behavior, appetite and appearance (weight, coat, etc.) for any changes. Although some veterinarians are likely to be unsupportive of your choice of diet for your companions, do not hide it from them. We recommend yearly vet visits and periodic blood and urine tests to monitor your cat or dog's ongoing health.

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### **What can I do to keep my cat from developing urinary tract problems?**

Urinary tract problems are among the most common ailment affecting cats. Under certain circumstances, the minerals in their urine can spontaneously arrange themselves into "crystals" while inside the bladder. In females, this is not considered to be a major medical risk; the next time they're in the litter box, they'll simply pee the crystals out. The worst that can happen is that the urinary tract becomes irritated and causes discomfort. For males, however, there is the additional danger that if enough crystals form and aggregate, the urethra can actually become blocked. There is an obvious anatomical reason why this can't happen to females.

It is not entirely understood why some cats are more susceptible than others to crystal formation, but it is only somewhere in the range of 10-15% of cats who seem to develop them chronically, while the rest will experience them occasionally if at all. In other words, 85-90% of cats will have reasonably good urinary tract health no matter what they eat. 85-90% will be perfectly fine on a vegan diet, with no additional precautions necessary. But for that other 10-15%, a vegan diet-- without proper supplementation-- can be a challenge.

The difficulty in controlling urinary tract problems while on a vegan diet is quite simply the fact that animal protein tends to be more acidic than plant protein. A meat-based diet produces a urinary pH that is less favorable to the formation of struvite crystals (the most common type) than one based on soy or other vegetables. The vegan cat food

manufacturers, of course, are well aware of this tendency and compensate by adding an amino acid urinary acidifier, methionine. This, for the 85-90% of cats who are not naturally prone to developing urinary tract problems, is sufficient to maintain a healthy pH. Yet for the remaining 10-15%, it may be necessary to take additional precautions.

There are a couple of things that can be done: the [Enzymes pH](#) formula is specially supplemented with methionine, vitamin C, and cranberry extract which can help both to keep the pH under control and soothe the urinary tract to minimize inflammation. This is probably not enough to reverse a severe case, but can be helpful in preventing symptoms in cats with more mild tendencies.

The next step up in terms of strength is a version of the Vegecat powdered supplement that has been specially designed for cats with this problem: [Vegecat pH](#). Depending on the severity of a cat's pH balancing difficulties, switching to Vegecat pH may or may not be sufficient to deal with the problem on its own.

For very severe cases, [methionine pills](#) may be necessary. We carry these on our website, but it is important to **get the correct dosage from a veterinarian before using them.**

The largest correlation of all between which cats will develop crystals chronically and which are able to keep these tendencies under control has nothing to do with whether they eat animal or vegetable protein or how much methionine is added to their food, but simply whether their food is wet or dry-- cats who eat nothing but dry kibble (vegetarian or otherwise) have substantially more urinary tract incidents than those who eat at least some canned/wet food as well. As a general rule, the more water they consume, whether directly or in their food, the better. Many cats seem to prefer to drink running water, and using a special kitty [drinking fountain](#) instead of a regular old water bowl is often an easy way to increase their consumption. You can also get more water into your cats' diet by simply adding water to their food.

Urinary tract disease-- in particular blockage-- can be painful, scary, expensive and a miserable experience for your cat. A cat who you suspect may be blocked must be taken to the vet immediately. Of course, the hope is that it will never have to come to that. We strongly recommend not waiting for blockage to occur before taking steps to prevent it. The precaution of making sure to use at least some canned or wet food along with kibble (or even cutting kibble out altogether) can be immensely helpful in heading off the problem before it even starts. **Do not use acidifiers though, unless you have tested the pH and found a need for them; methionine pills in particular are potentially very powerful, and there is a danger over acidifying if the correct dosage-- based on weight and starting pH-- is not given.**

It is also a very good idea to bring your male cats to the vet and have their urinary pH checked within a couple of weeks of putting them on a vegan diet. Even if they have been on vegan food for a while with no problems, it still may be a good idea to do this. If their pH is found to be outside of the normal range, or if crystals are found in the urine, you can easily make adjustments to address these issues and head off problems before they develop. Again, in 85-90% of cases, the pH will be found to be normal and no adjustments will be necessary, but it is worth the relatively inexpensive lab fee to find out for sure where your cat stands.

It is important, whether your cat is vegan or not, to be a responsible guardian and to monitor behavior, appetite and appearance (weight, coat, etc.) for any changes. Although some veterinarians are likely to be unsupportive of your choice of diet for your companions, do not hide it from them. We always recommend yearly vet visits and periodic blood and urine tests to monitor your cat's ongoing health.

### **How can I switch my cat or dog to a vegetarian diet?**

Many cats and some dogs have a tendency to be very picky about their food, and an attempt to switch them to a new diet may initially be met with resistance. Most of us did not become vegetarian or vegan overnight and we can't expect them to either!

Begin by mixing a small amount of new food with a normal amount of accustomed food, and gradually increase the ratio day by day (switching entirely should take at least a week). This will give them a chance to get used to the new flavors and minimize the risk of causing digestive upset (adding [digestive enzymes](#) to the food can also help). You might also find it effective to add [flavor enhancers](#) such as nutritional yeast, oil or veggie bacon bits. These treats can be phased out later on. Try a variety of foods and don't give up- thousands of cats and dogs have become vegan since the mid-1980's; there is no reason why your cat or dog can't do so as well!

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### **Are the vegan cat and dog foods nutritionally complete, or do I need to add supplements to them?**

The prepared brands of canned and kibble foods that we carry are all nutritionally complete, as are the meals made by following the recipes that accompany [Vegecat](#), [Vegekit](#), or [Vegedog](#). However we do strongly recommend the addition of an enzymes supplement.

Enzymes help with digestion, and studies have suggested their absence from the diet over a prolonged period of time may lead to more severe and earlier onset of diseases of aging such as arthritis.

Unfortunately, enzymes are very temperature sensitive, so significant amounts do not exist in any cooked or processed foods-- vegetarian or otherwise. Therefore, it is always advisable to make up for this limitation by adding a small amount of powdered enzyme supplement at each feeding.

We recommend [Good Digestion](#) when initially transitioning to a new diet, whenever antibiotics are given, and to treat common digestive problems such as diarrhea. In addition to enzymes, this formula contains probiotics-- beneficial gut bacteria that many cats and dogs may be lacking.

For cats who have experienced urinary tract disease, [Enzymes pH](#) is a better choice. This formula combines mild acifiers and cranberry extract with enzymes, helping to prevent the onset of urinary tract incidents while providing the same digestive benefits. This formula is mild enough that most male cats-- for whom these problems are more serious-- can be given it regardless of whether they have had urinary tract disease in the past or not. (For those with very strong tendencies towards urinary tract distress, this formula is not strong enough to prevent incidents from occurring by itself).

For general use, [Enzymes Plus](#) is a good, economical choice. This formula contains a full set of enzymes with no extras and is about half the price per weight than the other formulas.

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### **Which brand of dog food should I buy?**

Unless there is some compelling reason why it is necessary to use one of the other brands, you should go with Evolution and/or Vegedog.

We have made the decision to carry a few other vegetarian formulas (Natural Life, Nature's Recipe, and PetGuard) because they may meet the requirements of some dogs with very specific dietary needs (certain allergies, e.g.) who would have trouble being vegetarian otherwise, but we continue to feel very strongly that these foods should be used only as a last resort.

Evolution and Vegedog are both of the highest quality, but, even more importantly, both are 100% vegan, ethically-motivated companies, while the others make most of their profits from selling meat. In other words, buying one of these other brands is something like getting a baked potato at a Wendy's-- the food is vegan, and it'll do in a pinch, but it would definitely be preferable to spend your money at a vegan restaurant instead, rather than supporting a company that mainly deals in the products of animal

slaughter.

Equally troubling is the fact that most non-vegan "pet" food manufacturers utilize "feeding trials", which are essentially a form of animal testing. Only by making a concerted effort to support ethical companies such as Evolution and VegeDog can we be sure that our consumer dollars aren't going to be used for this purpose.

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**For more information, please see our [online articles](#).**

If you still have questions, please feel free to send us an email!

For nutritional/health-related questions, please email: [jed@vegancats.com](mailto:jed@vegancats.com)

All other questions should be directed to [mail@vegancats.com](mailto:mail@vegancats.com)

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