

Editorial A Cat Study

Every so often I read a research report that startles me. The startle effect is frequently due to the findings of the study. A friend brought this particular article to my attention. Published in 1946, the findings remain interesting and disturbing.

The studies began as a serendipitous finding. A physician was studying the effects of the adrenal gland on the course of tuberculosis. Using cats, he performed adrenalectomies. Although the surgeries were correct, many of the cats died following surgery. The cats were on a diet of cooked meat scraps from the sanatorium plus raw milk and cod-liver oil. When more cats were donated to the facility than could be fed by the sanatorium's table scraps, the market was contacted to provide raw meat scraps for the cats, including muscle, bone, and viscera. The cats fed on the raw scraps survived the surgeries, appeared to be in better health, and produced vigorous kittens. These results were so startling that the research team decided to do a feeding experiment that lasted 10 years. (The full text of this study can be found on the Web at www.price-pottenger.org. You may have difficulty finding the original article [Pottenger, 1946].) I will summarize some of the study and the findings here.

One series of experiments involved two groups of cats: Group 1 was fed a diet of two thirds raw meat, one third raw milk, and cod-liver oil; Group 2 was fed a diet of two thirds cooked meat, one third raw milk, and cod-liver oil. Approximately 900 cats were part of the experiment although only 600 had complete records. Results: The cats fed raw meat were uniformly healthy, produced healthy and vigorous offspring, had good resistance to vermin, infections, and parasites, and had excellent equilibrium. They either died of old age or accident. The cats on the cooked-meat diet produced heterogeneous offspring. Abortion was common with one fourth in the first generation and almost 75% in the second generation. Many cats died in labor; many kittens died, as the mothers could not lactate. Immune systems were compromised, becoming progressively worse from generation to generation. Osteomyelitis was common and often fatal. The diseases these cats developed included cardiac lesions, nephritis, hepatitis, meningitis, cystitis, arthritis, and thyroid disease. The most striking finding was that the third

generation of Group 2 cats (fed on the cooked meat) failed to thrive beyond 6 months of age and could not breed! (By the way, the same male cat was used as the stud for all litters. He was maintained on a raw diet.)

This experiment alone was enough to make me question my feeding program for my dogs and cat. Not only did I question the effect of cooked meat on my pets, I wondered what I was doing to myself by cooking almost everything I ate.

The feeding experiments continued: One group of cats, fed first on the raw-meat diet, was placed on a cooked-meat diet for 6 months before being returned to a raw-meat diet. Although these cats looked healthy, their kittens born during this period were compromised in similar ways to the cooked-meat kittens described above. If the kittens were later fed raw meat, their skeletal structure and calcification remained compromised.

Another experiment involved the return to a raw diet of first- and second-generation cooked-meat cats. Apparently it took four generations of raw feeding to return the offspring of these cats to normal skeletal and tissue structures. Remember, many of these cooked-meat cats could not breed successfully, so the return to health of these generations was slow and erratic.

Three other series of feeding experiments were also conducted using different kinds of milk along with a one-third diet of raw meat supplemented with cod-liver oil being held constant: raw milk, raw metabolized vitamin D milk, pasteurized milk, evaporated milk, and sweetened condensed milk. The cats on the raw-milk diet responded similarly to the cats on the raw-meat diet. The cats on the various other types of milk showed significant differences in growth, development, and resistance to diseases. The findings are documented through autopsy findings as well as radiographic evidence of lack of bone development and deteriorating ossification of skulls.

At the end of the experiment, all cats were autopsied and their cages were left vacant. Months later, the staff noticed that the weeds in the pen housing the raw-meat and raw-milk cats were more luxuriant than any of the other pens and that the cooked-meat and condensed-milk pens had the fewest weeds! A last experiment was conducted. The cat pens were all planted with two different kinds of beans. The resultant growth of the beans conformed to the findings of the growth and deterioration of the cats, with the raw-milk-and-meat pens having excellent bean development and the condensed-milk, cooked-meat pens being almost barren.

This study was published in a dental journal. Changes began to be seen in the mouth of these cats within 3 months of all experiments. None of the cats developed caries, but periodontal disease, major bone loss, and loss of teeth

were prevalent in the cats that did not receive the raw diets. The effect of nutrition on dentition and the bones of the head were marked.

I found this study remarkable. It began in the 1930s and was not published until 1946, at about the same time that we started to have more and more packaged foods, more and more meal-replacement foods, more and more deep-fried foods in fast-food restaurants, more and more “treatments” of milk, and on and on. In our drive for disease prevention and health promotion, in our need for cleanliness and germ reduction, are we compromising our own immune systems and creating our own diseases? What are the implications of this study for us today? What do you think?

Pamela J. Brink
Editor

REFERENCE

Pottenger, F. M. (1946). The effect of heat, processed foods and metabolized vitamin D milk on the dentofacial structures of experimental animals. *Oral Surgery*, 32(8), pp. 467-485.

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