

Helping Your Cat Transition to a Therapeutic Kidney Food

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When your cat is diagnosed with chronic kidney disease (CKD), your veterinarian may transition your pet to a renal therapeutic food (ie, food designed for cats with CKD), as studies have shown that feeding specially designed renal therapeutic cat foods to cats with CKD can help protect kidney function and help your cat maintain adequate body condition.

Getting your pet to accept a new food may seem like a daunting task, but there are products that have been formulated to help ease the transition. Renal therapeutic cat foods like Hill's Prescription Diet k/d food have been designed to have a taste that is appealing to our finicky feline friends, and they can also have a significant impact on your cat's health and quality of life.

When to Start Your Cat on a Renal Therapeutic Diet

Knowing the benefits, you may want to start the new therapeutic cat food immediately, but it is important to start the transition at the appropriate time. Cats can develop associations between negative experiences and food, so trying a new food when your cat is feeling less than their best can lead to food aversion. If your cat has been hospitalized, wait until they are home and settled for 2 to 3 days before cracking open that new food. Similarly, if your cat is vomiting, reluctant to eat their current food, and/or showing other signs of nausea, it may be best to wait to start a new therapeutic food until their appetite improves. If you are unsure of the best time to introduce a renal therapeutic cat food, be sure to ask your veterinarian for advice.

Transition Timeline

Not only is it important to pick the right time to introduce a new food, but it is also vital that the process is not rushed. As with any food change, a sudden switch can lead to an upset stomach and cause your cat to dislike their new food. Thus, a 7-day transition schedule is recommended.

7-Day Transition Schedule

Days 1-2: Start by replacing 25% of your cat's current food with the therapeutic food.

Days 3-4: Feed 50% new food and 50% current food.

Days 5-6: Feed 75% new food and 25% current food.

Day 7: Offer 100% of the therapeutic food.

Some cats will accept a food transition at a faster pace than others, and some may take longer than 7 days to fully transition to a new diet. If your cat is reluctant to accept the change, slow down the rate of transition. Some cats may take several weeks to make a full transition.

Diet Transition Tips & Tricks

Don't panic if your cat isn't showing immediate interest in the new food. This process can take some trial and error to find which specific diet your cat finds most appealing. Although the transition can take longer for some cats, don't lose hope; studies have shown that most cats are able to successfully transition to a kidney food.

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- ▶ Consider what type of food your cat is currently eating. For example, if your cat is most familiar with a dry, fish-flavored food, switching to a dry, fish-flavored therapeutic food may result in a smoother transition.
- ▶ Try offering a small amount of the therapeutic food as a treat and/or in its own dish instead of mixing it. Offering the old food and new food in separate bowls at the same time can help reduce stress and encourage your cat to investigate the new food.
- ▶ Be sure to offer *fresh* portions of the new food at least once a day. Many cats will not eat food that's been sitting out for hours.
- ▶ Be aware of the calories per cup of your cat's old food as compared with their new food. The amount of new food your cat needs may differ from the amount you have previously fed. If you have any doubts about how much to feed, ask your veterinarian to ensure your cat maintains a healthy weight and receives the nutrients they need.
- ▶ Placing a *small* amount of a "flavor topper" on top of the new food can encourage your cat to try it. Examples of flavor toppers include a favorite treat or bonito tuna flakes. Discontinue the topper once your cat has accepted the new food.
- ▶ Gently warming canned food can increase the appealing aroma for you cat. Be sure to stir the food to reduce any "hot spots" and test the temperature of the food before serving.
- ▶ Feeding small frequent meals will increase the opportunities your pet has to explore and try the new food.
- ▶ Avoid mixing medications into the new food. This may cause aversion if your cat can taste or smell the medication.
- ▶ If your cat doesn't like the first food you try, ask your veterinarian about different options. Hill's Prescription Diet k/d is available in a variety of forms and flavors to help suit your cat's preferences.

To improve your chances of success, be sure to keep open lines of communication with your veterinary team if challenges arise.

Troubleshooting

We have other cats at home. Can they eat this therapeutic cat food, too?

Renal therapeutic foods are specifically formulated for cats with CKD and therefore may not be ideal for otherwise healthy adult cats. Although it can be challenging, there are many tips that can make feeding different foods in a multi-cat household a little easier.

- ▶ Avoid free-feeding. Establishing set mealtimes will help control who's eating what.
- ▶ Many cats will consume a wet food in one sitting, which may help allow for a smoother transition to meal feedings.
- ▶ Separate feeding stations can also help, especially if you use physical barriers like separate rooms or feeding one cat on a high perch or inside a large crate.
- ▶ When you first start feeding different cat foods, you will need to supervise your pets to ensure no one is inadvertently eating out of the unintended food bowl.
- ▶ Technology can also help. There are bowls that only unlock if your cat is wearing a linked collar or microchip, only allowing food bowl access to the intended cat.

My cat liked their new therapeutic food at first, but now won't touch it.

If your cat was eating their therapeutic food well and suddenly stops, don't assume it's the food. Be sure to check in with your veterinarian to see if there is a medical reason your cat's appetite has declined. If your cat's health is stable, consider offering a new flavor or texture or mixing flavors or textures of their current therapeutic food. Some cats with CKD can also benefit from a prescription appetite stimulant, so be sure to alert your veterinarian if your pet has changes in their eating.

Conclusion

With patience, time, and the right tools, even picky eaters can learn to accept a food transition. To improve your chances of success, be sure to keep open lines of communication with your veterinary team if challenges arise. And remember, although cats with CKD can greatly benefit from a therapeutic renal food such as Hill's Prescription Diet k/d, it is imperative to schedule regular check-ups with your veterinarian so they can help monitor and maintain your cat's health and quality of life.